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ARE THEY THE SAME AT HOME?
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THE STAR-SPANGLED MANNER

By

BEVERLEY NICHOLS

CHECKED · 1963



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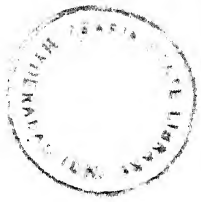
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TO

BETTY

IN MEMORY OF A SOUTHERN CROSS



CHAPTER ONE

100 per cent. Romantic

THE telephone rang in the hall of a tiny house in Chelsea. I answered it. Down the wire there drifted the voice of an American.

'This is Richard Halliburton speaking.'

'Yes?'

'You don't know who I am, do you?'

'Well . . .'

'I am the Beverley Nichols of America.'

'You are the *what*?'

'I am the Bev . . .'

A screech, and silence. Then a sound like the chatter of castanets. Then a liquid, honeyed voice crooned, 'Have you got them?'

I made a rude face at the voice. 'I shall get them pretty badly if you cut me off again.'

I hung up the receiver. My impatience was acute. There is nobody in this world whom a man so eagerly desires to meet as himself. Hitherto I had not seen how it could be done. But now . . .

The telephone rang again.

'Is that you – or ought I to say, is that *I*?'

'Yes, it is.'

'And are you really the . . . what you said you were?'

'Yes. I wanted to explain myself. I sent you a book of mine this morning.'

'What was it called?'

'The Royal Road to Romance.'

'Oh!'

'Could I see you some time?'
'Any time.'
Whereupon we made a date for lunch.

A curious psychological crisis is precipitated in the person who is asked to meet himself. There is something a little uncanny about it. The mind becomes a battlefield of memory. Echoes of old desires, which, you thought, had drifted away for ever, come floating down the corridors, blowing clear and shrill. Through the window of the senses floats a delicate medley of perfumes – the smell of wet grasses in forgotten fields, the puff of smoke from fires long quenched.

Before the troubled vision there wanders a procession of ghosts with many faces, yet always the same face . . . your own. In sunshine, laughing, in shadow, very young, very old, – you, you, *you* – and yet, there is the terrible feeling that the faces belong to a stranger, to a man whom you have never known, whom you long to know, whom you will never meet.

G. K. Chesterton once said that his own back was as remote and mysterious to him as Thibet, because in all his life he had never seen it. I suffer from no such privation, having learnt, as a child, the keen æsthetic pleasure I could derive from the simple process of standing in front of a triple mirror. But there are no triple mirrors of the mind. There are no moods in which one can see the soul in profile. There are no moods, even, in which you can look yourself squarely in the face.



CHAPTER ONE

Until, of course, you meet yourself. Or are told that you are about to do so. The actual meeting is not of vital importance. What matters is the shock which the imminence of such a meeting will give you. It certainly gave me such a shock.

I wandered into my sitting-room, and looked out of the window. The rain was falling again, but the sun still shone, burnishing the windows of the opposite houses. So there was another 'me' in London, was there? I found myself wondering if the other 'me' would be feeling the same melancholy delight because the wet skies were shot with ragged sunshine. I wondered, too, if on such occasions he was inclined, like I, to question the authenticity of his emotions, – if he would ask himself, at the very moment when those wet skies seemed to chill his spirit, whether the chill were genuine, or whether he was suffering an emotion dictated to him by convention. Did he feel, like I, that life was like a tour with a guide from whom one could never quite escape, that one's emotions were constantly being switched from their natural course by a harsh voice speaking behind one's back, telling one what one ought to think? Even now, the guide was behind me as I looked out of the window, – whispering tags of Shelley, referring to certain Whistler etchings. Would one never be able to think *alone*?

I turned to the piano. On it lay a transcription of Cesar Franck's Fantasia in F minor. Did that music mean to him what it meant to me? Were its opening phrases as the tramp of a lonely giant over the boundaries of the earth, and did he find, in the agonizing

beauty of the later melody, the answer to the questions which he could not answer in this world?

Was he constantly maddened by the feeling that his moods bore no sort of relation to the outward circumstances of his life? Were there nights when for no reason whatever he would cry to heaven to save him from the cruelty of human existence, to draw down the curtain quickly, before the petty farce was ended? Were there other nights when he pleaded for a little longer, when he would have the actors play their parts again, would bribe the showman to keep the lights burning, would pray to the Great Dramatist (a Person sadly ignorant of dramatic construction) to write in a few more lines because the play was so wonderful? And did he always wonder why he had no control over the drama itself, why he must always seem a spectator, with no say in cast or plot?

I glanced at a letter which lay, newly opened, on my desk. It was from an anonymous correspondent in New Zealand whose sole justification for existence seemed to be that he was a voracious reader of my own works. And the emotions which he had gained from them may be gathered from his opening sentence: – 'It is not *for long* that we men, who still have some sense of decency, and still believe in pure womanhood (*sic*), will tolerate *things* like you.' I wondered if the other 'me' received letters like that, and if he, too, were born with a total incapacity for distinguishing between vice and virtue. I wondered if he had the same sympathy as I for liars, kleptomaniacs and devotees of the stirring art of arson. And the same hatred for school-masters, Spartan

mothers, drill-sergeants, and all those estimable people who make the world, out of sheer weariness, go round – and round and round.

A cat walked exquisitely across my garden wall. At each step it shook a delicate paw, and I could see a raindrop fly into the air. The cat's tail was poised with perfect precision, and its neck was superbly arched. As it came to the lilac bush at the end of my twenty feet of territory, it pushed aside a branch with its nose. A shower of raindrops fell to the earth. An ecstatic shiver ran down its back. It crossed the boundary of my wall to my neighbour.

Did he love cats as much as I did? Had he paused in streets at dawn to speak to these black spectres that glide between the area railings? Had he walked home from futile parties, footsore and tired, and been restored by a chance meeting with a tabby, whom he had coaxed, after great endeavour, from an armed hostility to a purring peace?

The wind blew through the window, puffed out a curtain, soughed itself away. Listlessly, hopelessly, the curtain fell back against the wall, its brief gesture finished. I felt for it the pity I always feel for inanimate things which are given a fleeting life only by some external force. Had he such pities too? Did he pity the windmill, stretching weary arms to the sky, alive, so desperately alive, yet only able to express that life, only able to whirl its arms when the fickle wind should choose to blow its way? Did he mourn for the proud chandeliers in deserted rooms, cold and dull, forced to hide their blazing heart of fire, because no sun would ever touch them to gold, no moon

paint them to silver? Did he see in these things a reflection of our own lives, waiting, as we are, for something outside ourselves to bring light and life to the dark places of the spirit?

A beggar passed by in the street – the twentieth beggar who had passed that day. His lips were twisted into the grotesque mockery of a song. Faintly I could hear the words – 'Oh Genevieve, . . . sweet Ge-henevieve.' The beggar was an ironic comment on the economic condition of the second greatest financial centre of the world. The streets of London are strewn with such comments. Most people seem to have got used to them. I haven't. It is a pity, because during my lifetime the streets of London may never be free from beggars . . . but I won't bother you with that. All I asked myself was how our beggars affected him. Perhaps, since he was an American, he thought that they were beggars because they wouldn't work, not realizing that there is no work for them to do, that . . . but I am off again.

That last reflection made me face the final problem – he was an American. Now, I can imagine a great many American editions of things English, but I cannot conceivably imagine an American edition of myself. I can imagine an American H. G. Wells – rather more easily, in fact, than I can imagine an English one. I can imagine an American Alfred Noyes – indeed, if any people were to cast doubts upon his English birth, I should be the last, as a true patriot, to contradict them. I can even imagine an American Rebecca West. But by no effort can I imagine an American Beverley Nichols. The idea is

ludicrous. Its folly cries to the heavens. To tell you why, I should have to write a history of the world, so you must take for granted this fact, of such vital interest to the student of world events.

There was a knock at the door. I was given a parcel. I tore away the paper. It was *The Royal Road to Romance*. From the jacket, I gathered that it had sold 120,000 copies in the U.S.A. I opened it at random, my fingers trembling with excitement. Here, at last, I should look myself face to face, should have that privilege (for which every writer secretly dreams) of reading my own work for the first time. It happened that I turned to page 19. It was a description of Mr. Halliburton's ascent of the Matterhorn, in the company of a friend. Taking a deep breath, I read:

'In that fierce moment of intense living we felt our blood surge within us. The terrors and struggles of the climb were forgotten. The abyss beneath us, the bewildering panorama about us, cast a spell that awed me to silence.

'"Oh Dick," whispered my friend in such unusually solemn tones that I awaited some great inspired utterance about the sublimity of Nature and the glory of God. . . .

'"At last," he continued, "at last I can actually spit a mile!"'

And, at that, I heaved a sigh of relief. If it is true that a man is known by the company he keeps, I appeared to be still unique.

CHAPTER TWO

Sky Lines

SINCE the theme of this book is America, we have really no excuse for lingering with Mr. Richard Halliburton in the Café Royal, drinking red wine, while the lazy traffic rolls outside the doors on its way to Piccadilly. Yet here, at the outset, is a tempting opportunity to note a fundamental difference between the Englishman and the American.

As he sat there, narrating the story of his remarkable adventures, it was very soon evident that the American was experiencing all the obvious emotions. He had swum the Hellespont, and in doing so his mind had been charged with dreams of Byron and Leander – dreams historically inaccurate, yet none the less vivid. He had run from Marathon to Athens – (nearly all the way) – and the spirit of Pheidippides had hovered over his every pace. He had lingered in the Taj Mahal by moonlight and had promptly found himself 'transported to some previous existence that knew neither time nor space nor substance.' History does not tell us whether he ever slept in the bed of Madame Pompadour, but if ever he did he would certainly have had the pleasure of dreaming that he was Louis XV.

Few Englishmen could experience such essentially orthodox emotions. That is their misfortune. If you were to ask an Englishman why he swam the Hellespont, he would probably reply 'to reach the other side.' If you were to ask him why he ran to Athens, he would doubtless say' because there was no

bus.' If you were to ask him his sentiments concerning the lily-pool in the moonlit Taj Mahal, he would almost certainly observe that its aroma by night was, at least, less offensive to European nostrils than by day. He would never allow that a shadowy Greek or a dissolute English poet had put him to all these exertions, nor would he pay even lip-service to the so-called mysticism of the East, which he considers to be due to a blend of ignorance and inferior sanitation.

Yet Richard Halliburton really felt these things, and it was fortunate for him that he did so, because he was able to transfer his orthodox emotions to 120,000 American readers through the medium of his pen, and to some 500,000 American lecture-goers through the medium of his voice. Yet, in England, his book was hardly read at all. For in England we have either forgotten the obvious emotions, or are ashamed of them, whereas in America, either you experience the obvious emotions, or would be ashamed to admit that you didn't.

'Don't you ever sit still?' I said to him, when we were crossing the Atlantic. (We could not finish our conversation in the Café Royal, so we decided to go over in the same ship.) 'Don't you ever see a mountain without leaving the poor thing under the illusion that it is invincible? Don't you ever let a jungle alone? Don't you ever see an ocean without wanting to go bouncing about in it to prove that it has no terrors for you?'

Mr. Halliburton's eyes glistened, and his features were illuminated by that radiant expression which

so demoralized the audiences of countless women's clubs. 'Never,' he said. 'I'm just driven on and on. I can't stop myself. I can't talk slowly. I can't think slowly. I can't rest.'

'Perhaps it's your glands,' I suggested. 'Too much thyroid, you know.'

He scorned this theory. Nothing so prosaic as glands could make one swim the Hellespont or undertake an American lecture tour. 'It's Something in me,' he said.

'Well,' I replied, 'glands are 'something in you.' At least one would shrivel up, or go mad, if they weren't.'

'You don't understand,' he repeated, 'because you don't know young America. I'm not exceptional. I've merely chosen this way of expressing an energy which nearly everybody in America feels.'

'But if you go on like this you'll burst.'

'I don't care if I do.'

'And you won't be able to write any more best-sellers.'

'Oh yes, I shall. *The Royal Road to Romance* was written in elevators and Pullman cars, at two o'clock in the morning, – *The Glorious Adventure* was written in just the same way.'

It would have been unkind to suggest that I had guessed as much, from the style of these two books. For though they are not remarkable for style, they have a real force, and they tell the story of adventures which many young men would have been proud to share. I therefore asked him what he was going to do next.

'Nothing very much,' he said.

'I see. Climbing the Woolworth Building with your teeth, for instance, or diving into Vesuvius?'

'No,' he said, 'I'm going to South America.'

I waited for what was coming next. Then, a little diffidently –

'I *did* want to climb Popocatepetl.'

'That line,' I suggested, 'would make a lovely cue for a song. I *did* want to climb Popocatepetl. You would have to make the first four syllables into demi-semi quavers though. I *did* . . .'

'And to swim the Panama Canal from end to end,' he continued breathlessly, 'and go to Robinson Crusoe's Island, Juan Fernandez, and live in goat-skins and be waited on by a Friday. . . .'

'The man who was Friday,' I thought.

'And climb across the Andes and go down the Amazon. . . .'

He went on in this strain, talking with amazing verve for nearly half an hour. And it was not only talk, it was prophecy – for these things are as nothing to what he has already done.

I was enchanted by it all. It was only long afterwards that I suddenly saw the irony of the fact that these exploits had been commissioned by *The Ladies' Home Journal.*

Since I have a capacity for being misunderstood which amounts almost to genius, it is necessary to explain, in a very few words, the purpose of the preceding pages.

The first purpose, of course, was to talk about myself. Every season, with a succession of dull

thuds, countless 'books about America,' written by foreigners, fall from the printing presses. Though they may never use the first person singular, their authors are really far more egotistical than I, for they have the conceit to imagine that they can write a book about half the world (and the most important half) without making fools of themselves. I realize that the day has long passed for any volume of 'American impressions' which can possibly be representative. All I can reasonably hope to do is to give the effect of certain experiences upon a certain personality. Which was why I told you that I liked cats – of which creatures there is a deplorable shortage in the United States.

Unless, therefore, you are prepared for a considerable amount of egotism, you had better lay down this book and grope, with tapering fingers, along your bookshelves, until you find a volume written by one of those real Englishmen who hunts big game in Central Africa, and is so self-effacing that he only allows himself to be photographed once for each chapter, reclining in dubious attitudes upon the spines of bored elephants.

The second purpose of the preceding pages was to introduce, as a sort of symbol, one of those vital, energetic young Americans who form – for me, at least – such an invigorating contrast to their European prototypes.

I am at once bored and infuriated by half my English contemporaries. They are without vision, and without force. A few years ago, there was still an excuse to be made for them. The memories of the

war were so agonizing that the younger generation had every reason to drown their sorrows with a perpetual jazz-band. But that excuse no longer holds good. One is growing up. What is one going to do about it? Nothing, apparently, except to order some more suits, on credit, to buy a few more American gramophone records, and to live on one's father's rapidly diminishing capital. That is what half the men who were with me at Oxford after the war are doing to-day, and it makes me so sick at heart that I shall leave the subject and proceed as rapidly as possible to America.

It is high time that some subtle humorist should classify the various manners in which the writers of American impressions have described their respective arrivals in New York.

First would come those who are moved to lyric ecstasy by the sight of the skyline. Apparently they were previously ignorant of the existence of this phenomenon, for they always begin on a note of melodious astonishment: –

'*Through the morning mist there gleamed a fairy city. Towers loftier than Aladdin's dream, turrets that seem to flaunt the pale sunlight, a million windows glistening. . . . Well might one apply to this miraculous vision the lines which Wordsworth wrote, as he stood upon the bridge of old Westminster* (*now, alas! so far, far away*).

. . .

' "*Dull would he be of soul who could pass by*
A sight so touching in its majesty!" '

This form of description is a great favourite with Anglican bishops. It is a pity, for two reasons. Firstly because it causes them to use up their somewhat inadequate collection of adjectives, so that they have nothing left to apply to American plumbing – (which, one imagines, would even more warmly impress them). Secondly, because such ecstasies indicate an other-worldliness too marked even for an Anglican bishop. It should be evident to anybody with the least knowledge of modern art that America is the only country in the world (with the possible exception of Sweden and Finland) where architects are doing beautiful work. If we are unaware of that, in England, we are unpardonably provincial. If we are aware of it, let us admit it, but do not let us be betrayed into an attitude of condescension.

Next in the list come those visiting professors who have spent all their lives in the exhilarating atmosphere of Oxford or Cambridge, varying the monotony by an occasional flurried visit to London. Their minds are – oh! so broad, and their wit is – oh! so keen. They know that they are among savages, but they have the sweetest determination to treat the savages kindly. They usually begin by writing down a few sentences in the vernacular, as though they were recording the more dribbling utterances of a man-eating tribe in Central Africa. Their keen classical training is, no doubt, responsible for the veracity and wit of such passages as the following, which any cultured American will instantly recognize as the mirror of his own speech: –

CHAPTER TWO

'Gee,' said the Colonel, spitting vigorously into the Atlantic – (wine-coloured as in Homer's days) – 'this is a bum grape-fruit. Hells-bells, it'll be swell to park the old fanny in a caféteria again.'

I once knew a rather charming Oxford professor who went all through America under the impression that his fanny was a suit-case. I understand that there was quite an outbreak of virtuous indignation among the coloured porters of Omaha when he rushed round the station asking them if anybody had tampered with his fanny.

Then again, one must not omit those modern, highly sensitized persons who wish to make it quite clear that they realize that New York is very, very new, and very, very significant, and very, very vital. They are so sympathetic about it all that they are usually slightly incoherent. Thus: –

'Straight lines, harsh shadows, steel, steel, steel. The shriek of syrens, the clang of hammers, the brazen cry of a million horns. Pigmy-like, the crowds march with mechanical gestures into the Maw of Mammon. The wind of the new world sweeps my face, keen, chill, challenging. But the wind is tainted by gasoline, and its whisper is drowned by the din. God, what has Man done to You? Man, what have You done to God? Yet – (forgive me, old England), my young blood is stirred.'

Their young blood is usually stirred to such an extent that they may be observed, forty-eight hours later, in the nearest speak-easy, gazing at the waiter with glazed eyes, and asking in throaty voices for a little bicarbonate of soda.

Finally, come the English business men. These are legion. They always make me feel, as an Englishman, a little self-conscious, because they are inclined to proclaim, not silently, that American prosperity is only a fluke, and that England's industrial decline is due merely to inevitable natural causes. Still, their reflections are worthy of notice. They always begin like this:

'*Endowed by Nature with the vastest resources known to man, happily sheltered from those unfortunate international disturbances which so agitate the markets of the old world, unhampered by tradition and*' – (here follows the inevitable reference to the war) – '*is it to be wondered at that America, etc., etc., etc.?*'

If these English business men could see, as I have seen, a young Middle-Western millionaire sweating in his shirt-sleeves at nine o'clock in the morning by the side of his own workmen, they might possibly realize that American prosperity is not entirely a matter of luck.

I fear that I am tempted by none of these avenues of approach. It is high time that we took the New York skyline for granted – as one of the seven wonders of the world. A cultured American writer does not inform his readers that there is a fine old church in London called Westminster Abbey. He assumes that his readers have heard of it before. Nor does he refer – as though imparting information – to a pretty little place near Paris called Versailles. He realizes that these things are part of the general heritage of educated mankind. And so, I shall not tell

you, as do so many memoir writers, that the Pennsylvania Railway Station is as impressive as St. Paul's Cathedral. For one thing, we ought to be already familiar with it. For another, it happens to be a much finer example of architecture than anything which ever built itself in the rather over-rated mind of Sir Christopher Wren.

I prefer to begin with a person – a strange, and indeed a disagreeable person – but one who has caused a large amount of ink to flow on both sides of the Atlantic. His name you will read at the beginning of the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

Fee Fo Fum

Fee Fo Fum
I smell the blood of an Englishman!

WHEN I arrived in America, Big Bill Thompson, Mayor of Chicago, was delivering himself of a great many acidulous statements concerning His Majesty, King George V. King George, apparently, was conspiring in the most tiresome manner against Chicago's school-children. The white minds of these innocents were being stained by his abominable suggestions. At any moment, one gathered, King George might emerge from the centre of Lake Michigan in a submarine, and start a new revolution.

I always like to be in at the kill, and so I hurried to Chicago without delay. Within twenty-four hours I was seated in the outside office of Big Bill himself, waiting, with a certain trepidation, to be admitted.

The anterooms of the great are silently eloquent of the men to whom they belong. One used to approach the late Lord Curzon through chilled and lofty corridors in the manner of Louis XVI, and await his arrival upon couches in the Empire style. The road to Lloyd George, on the other hand, leads through a homely door in Chelsea, painted a cheerful green, redolent of optimism. White walls, starkly simple, conducted one to Bernard Shaw's apartment in the Adelphi, and an iron gate, securely locked, barred the

populace from ascending the staircase that led to the sage's study.

And so it would need no Sherlock Holmes to form an adequate picture of Mayor Thompson's mind merely by observing the preparatory paraphernalia of his office. I had received a hurried call to that office, which is situated in a vast Chicago hotel, and had thither precipitated myself with such haste that I feared I should have little time to collect my thoughts before being ushered into the Presence. However, as it happened, I had a good half-hour to wait, in an atmosphere of clicking typewriters and buzzing telephones, before he was ready for me. And that half-hour, in view of the strange objects with which the office was filled, was by no means wasted.

First, the pictures. What immediately caught my attention was a series of four panels, in a single frame. Each represented Mayor Thompson at some stage of his career. The first picture showed a husky youth standing against a blue sky, contemplating a somewhat misshapen football. (Moral: this is a real he-man.) The second picture showed that youth grown to maturity, a large pink face beaming from above a highly starched collar. (Moral: this is a kindly, red-blooded man.) The third picture was quite a *tour de force* of imaginative art, for it portrayed the Mayor, magnified to some seventy times his natural size, perched on top of the City Hall, from which position he surveyed the world triumphantly. (Moral: this is a Colossus.) The fourth picture showed, one trusts, the most vivid imagination of all, for it appeared to

be a view of the White House, slightly improved from an architectural point of view. (The moral of this is too obvious to be indicated.)

As soon as I had observed these pictures I was happy to note that his Honour, with that impartiality so becoming in the great, had permitted a picture of another American to be hung beside his own. This was none other than Lindbergh himself, and it was gratifying to read the verse that was printed underneath, for it showed that the Mayor understood that so supreme an exploit could be celebrated only in lyric words. The words ran as follows:

> They asked how I did it
> And I pointed to that Scripture text:
> 'Keep your light a'shining
> A little in front of the next.'

I resumed my examination of the room, under the suspicious eyes of a number of secretaries, journalists, and satellites. Stepping over a quantity of spittoons, conveniently disposed, I entered a second anteroom, to be greeted by further evidences of the Mayor's intellectual leanings. His Honour's taste in music was happily displayed by three phonograph records bearing the title 'Two Black Crows.' His Honour's taste in art was agreeably demonstrated by various bronze figures of elephants and other monarchs of the jungle, occasionally relieved by a recumbent figure of a Moorish female, executed in china and daintily picked out in blue, yellow, and red. His sense of the whimsical was evident in two plaster figures of girls, such as one observes in certain of the remoter

streets of Paris. These girls were clothed in little bunchy frocks tied round the waist. Across the chest of each of them there crawled a miniature fly.

I was about to investigate a picture that showed a large likeness of Mayor Thompson surrounded by some very small likenesses of such lesser figures as Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln, when the door of the sanctum was thrown open, and a voice roared out that I should go in. I went in.

I saw seated before me a man rather past the prime of life, built on a very large scale, with the complexion and figure that one usually associates with a *bon viveur*. A half-chewed cigar protruded from his somewhat full lips. (I observed a dozen discarded cigars, well chewed at both ends, in the waste-basket by his side.) He was in shirt sleeves, very much at his ease, and apparently in an amiable mood, for he held out his hand in a gesture of welcome.

'Come right in. Make yourself at home.'

'They told me I'd never get out of this office alive.'

'Well – d'you think that now?'

I shook my head.

'What d'you want, anyway?'

I leaned over and faced him. He returned my stare frankly. Give the man his due – he looks you straight in the eyes.

'I've come to you,' I said, 'as a fairly typical Englishman who happens to possess a considerable personal affection for America. I have a feeling that I haven't got the truth about you from the newspapers. The newspapers make you' – (I wanted to say that they made him look a prize idiot, but that

seemed impolite) – 'they hardly seem to treat your contentions with the seriousness that they deserve. I want to know exactly what are your charges against England and how you substantiate them.'

For a moment he said nothing. He remained staring into my face. Then he reached out his hand and grasped a roll of parchment. (The gesture looked as though it had been well rehearsed.) He unrolled the parchment on his knee, and this baffling dialogue took place:

'George Washington,' he said, 'was the father of my country.'

'Quite.'

'I revere George Washington.'

'Quite.'

'This is a copy of the American Constitution.'

'Quite.'

'America doesn't meddle in the affairs of other nations.'

'Quite.'

'Well?'

He looked at me as though expecting me to say something. I was at a loss. I was waiting impatiently for *him* to say something. So far, he had only delivered himself of four moral platitudes. It was my turn to say 'Well?' and I did. Whereupon he resumed:

'Why, therefore, should other nations meddle in the affairs of America?'

'But what nation is actually meddling?'

So surprised was he at this naïve question that his cigar, which had now the consistency of damp sea-

weed, fell with a dull splash on to the floor. It was picked up by an attendant and deposited with its fellows in the waste-basket. 'What nation is meddling?' roared his Honour. 'What nation is . . . Here! Look at that book in front of you.'

He pointed to a small blue volume that lay on the table. I took it up. It was a copy of Schlesinger's *New Viewpoints in American History*.

'Turn to page 160.'

I turned.

'Read that passage that is marked in pencil. Then tell me what you think, not as an Englishman, but as an honest man.'

At last, I felt, I was at the heart of the matter. Taking a deep breath, I read the passage. And since it was the only evidence that Thompson showed me, since it was presumably the most powerful argument that he had to offer, it is only fair that it should be reproduced in full. Here it is:

'When the representatives of George V rendered homage a few years ago at the tomb of the great disloyalist and rebel of a former century, George Washington, the minds of many Americans reverted, with a sense of bewilderment, to the times when another King George was guiding the destinies of the British nations. The fact is that the average American still accepts without qualification or question the partisan justifications of the struggle for independence which have come down from the actual participants in the affair on the American side. These accounts, colored by the emotions and misunderstandings of the times

and designed to arouse the colonists to a warlike pitch against the British Government, have formed the basis of the treatments in our school textbooks and have served to perpetuate judgments of the American Revolution which no fair-minded historian can accept to-day.'

I finished reading the passage, but for a moment I kept my eyes on the book. This was really a little embarrassing. For I saw absolutely nothing of an offensive nature in it. If Washington were not a 'great disloyalist,' what was he? Was it not the fact that he had chosen a greater loyalty than his allegiance to an Anglo-German sovereign that entitles him to the respect of history? If he were not a 'great rebel,' what was the meaning of the phrase, 'the American Revolution'? It was on the tip of my tongue to give utterance to these reflections when Thompson interrupted me.

'Are Chicago's public-school-children to be taught that George Washington was a traitor?'

'No,' I said, 'but –'

I was answered by a torrent of words. He gave me no opportunity to say that I thought his bogey was a fake. The air was thick with vituperation. 'They' had removed from the history books the name of Von Steuben, the German who helped to drill George Washington's army. 'They' had omitted to pay due homage to DeKalb, who had served in a similar capacity. 'They' had impudently lavished their fervour on the Battle of Quebec in 1759, which made Canada British. Who 'they' were,

and where 'they' had done these things, I was not informed. But if 'their' activities were fairly exemplified by the very mild passage to which he had drawn my attention, I cannot imagine anybody but a neurotic old maid being honestly alarmed by their activities.

Already, therefore, I had begun to realize that as far as the school-books were concerned, the Mayor's campaign was a farce. I was still, however, undecided as to whether he was honest in his contention that George V was 'conspiring' against Chicago. The idea was so obviously *opéra bouffe* that one hesitated to suggest it to any person of adult intelligence, but here before me, apparently, was its originator, and I had to get at the truth.

Hence I began: 'Now, about George V.'

At once, an interruption. 'I'm not talking about George V. I'm talking about George Washington.'

'I know. But you *have* talked about George V, haven't you?'

He moved impatiently in his chair.

'I want to know, quite definitely, what you think he is doing in Chicago.'

He moved still more impatiently. Suddenly, with a disarming smile, he jumped to his feet. And this time the diversion that he introduced was so amusing that I almost welcomed it. He lumbered over to the other side of the room and pointed to a singular object that hung on the wall over his bed. It appeared to be partly a telephone and partly a radio set.

'See this?' asked Thompson.

Momentarily relegating George V to the back of my mind, I looked at it.

'Well, a friend of mine said it was about time that I had a telepho-radio set so I could ring up Buckingham Palace whenever I felt like speaking to King George. Here it is. Three rings for Buckingham Palace. Listen.'

Hand on hip, beaming at me, cigar dripping from his mouth, he pressed a button. A bell rang three times. A musical-box tinkled a gay tune. And suddenly, the doors of the apparatus flew open, disclosing a bottle containing a yellow fluid, surrounded by six glasses.

'What d'you think of that?' He slapped his thigh and doubled up with laughter. The laughter was caught up by the attendant satellites and secretaries. The room echoed with guffaws.

'He's a reg'lar guy.'

'That's the stuff, all right.'

'Some stiffs would give a hundred dollars for a spoonful of that.'

A sudden silence. It was up to me. What should I say? Evidently, the wrong thing. Because I said, for the second time:

'Now, about George V.'

There was a rustle of impatience. Rather sullenly his Honour closed the doors of the apparatus and lumbered back to his seat. He took another cigar and almost bit it through in the first two seconds. For a moment his eyes wandered round the room as though to find some other toy with which to placate me, his persecutor, but since none presented itself, he looked me straight in the eye once more.

'Are American children to be taught that—'

This time it was my turn to interrupt. In a loud voice I said:

'American children are certainly not to be taught that George Washington was a traitor. We are both agreed upon that point. What I want to know is if you really think that King Ge –'

In a still louder voice he chased away the phantom of His Majesty that I was so desperately endeavouring to materialize. Speaking very rapidly, he said:

'When I was out West a man came up to me and asked me how my private war with King George was getting along. I said, "I've got no private war with King George."'

I leaped at my opportunity. It seemed a case of now or never. I said:

'Then you didn't ever actually refer to George V in so many words, when you were fighting the library committee?'

He looked at me fiercely, and ignored that question. He said:

'And another man asked me if I hated all Englishmen. I told him not to talk nonsense. I told him, for instance, that Sir Thomas Lipton was one of my greatest friends.'

Silently I cursed Sir Thomas Lipton. I didn't want to hear about Sir Thomas Lipton. I knew Sir Thomas Lipton quite as well as the Mayor knew him, and I hadn't come to hear any more. I had come to find out if it was possible that the Mayor of one of the greatest cities of the world could actually be so plunged in ignorance as to be convinced that the constitutional monarch of the British Empire was

endeavouring (by what means, heaven knows!) to poison the minds of American school-children. I had come to find that out, and since the Mayor would not say it himself, I decided that the only thing to do would be to say it for him. I, therefore, took a deep breath, threw away my cigar, which out of sheer nervousness I was beginning to masticate in a manner similar to my august host, and spoke as follows:

'I imagine that *when* you referred to George V' – I paused to see if he marked the fact that I said 'when' and not 'if' – 'you were using him only as a symbol?'

No reply.

'I imagine also,' I continued, 'that you are aware that His Majesty's powers are exceedingly limited? That the consent of Parliament is necessary before he can change a button on his soldiers' uniforms?'

No reply.

I was becoming a little irritated, which accounts for what followed:

'I imagine, also,' I concluded, 'that you would agree that it would be insane to regard King George V as in any way a menace to anybody at all?'

No reply.

And then, I abandoned that particular avenue of approach. I think I was justified in concluding that Mayor Thompson *had* expressed the sentiments that had been attributed to him. And also that he was not particularly proud of having done so.

But I obtained an admission a few minutes later. And so significant did that admission appear to me that I copied it down, word for word, on his Honour's desk, under his Honour's nose. We had been dis-

cussing the letter that a young American named Durant Smith, residing at Oxford, had just published in the London *Daily News*, condemning Thompson and all his works. Thompson, referring to that letter, said:

'Certain of my friends' – he paused, and added quickly, 'my *emotional* friends, have been inclined to deplore the existence of the Rhodes Scholars. They have said' – (always 'they,' you observe) – 'they have said that young Americans who go over to Oxford become imbued with pro-British and anti-American ideas. Up till now I may not have agreed with them. But after Durant Smith's letter, I'm not so sure. That kid was a friend of mine.' He looked at me rather pathetically. 'He used to be a 100 per cent. American. And now . . . this.'

He handed me a telegram from Smith himself. In it Smith stated that he was a patriotic American. He also stated that it was absurd to maintain that the British ruling classes were conspiring against America. And as soon as I read that, I fixed upon it, and asked: 'Do you think that the British ruling classes *are* conspiring against you?'

It was a direct question, and Thompson could not evade it. He gulped, set his mouth, and said these words: '*I may think that the British ruling class is spreading insidious propaganda, or some one else.*'

That was enough for me. Heedless of manners, heedless of the attendant secretaries, satellites, and publicity men, I seized a pencil and wrote down those sixteen words of folly. For folly they are. The picture that they evoke is too ludicrous to warrant

any but the briefest consideration. Yet, consider it for a moment. You would have to picture a darkened room in London, with Lord Balfour whispering evil thoughts into the ear of Premier Baldwin. You would have to place before them certain history books, into which they pencilled their wicked imaginings. There would be a rap at the door, and there enters an American professor, his pockets loaded with British gold, his horn spectacles removed in order that he might pass for an Englishman. The two perfidious statesmen show the professor their handiwork and he examines it with gloating approval. And then they all repair to Buckingham Palace, to receive the sanction of the bloodthirsty King-Emperor, whose forked tail can be perceived sticking out of his ermine robes.

And this is the picture that sufficiently deluded the inhabitants of one of the world's greatest cities to cause them to elect, by a majority of 180,000, the man who painted it. And caused them not only to elect him but also to forget every real issue that concerned them.

It had taken me an hour to stop Thompson's posings and to get him down to brass tacks. The process had been exhausting, for apart from his own evasions there had been a constant stream of comment from the satellites. This mass of comment was evidently intended to cloud the issue, for when Thompson began to tell me stories in which he appeared in a rather less dubious light, it ceased abruptly. One of these stories seems to me very well worth repeating, for it not only illuminates the corruption of a certain

section of the Press, but it also serves to clear Thompson of one quite unwarranted accusation.

He said to me: 'I expect you have heard that during the war, I publicly insulted Joffre by refusing to meet him at the station.'

I muttered that such information had indeed reached me.

'Very well. Look at this.'

He pushed across the desk a Press photograph and requested me to study it. I did so. It showed Thompson, immaculately hatted and cravatted, sitting in a car whose other occupants were Joffre and Viviani. All three men wore smiles of beaming amiability. The picture was certainly a record of fact, and it appeared to be record of a sufficiently happy fact.

'Got it?'

I intimated that I had 'got it.'

'Very well, then. A certain newspaper in Chicago printed that picture that you see before you, in its twelve o'clock edition. When the three o'clock edition appeared, the picture had been taken out, and in its place there was a story that I had publicly insulted Joffre by refusing to meet him at the station, and incorporated in that story was a suggestion that any British delegates would be well advised to keep away from Chicago, for fear that they would be subjected to similar insults. What d'you think of that?'

Needless to say, I thought – as any decent person would have thought – that Thompson had been subjected to extremely shabby treatment.

But it was not that story that made me think better of him. It was the answer – entirely unexpected – that he gave me just before I left, on the subject of international armaments. True, the impression was only momentary – a sudden flash of light upon a dark field – but it was strangely vivid while it lasted. For suddenly, out of those lips that had been muttering inanities and hollow phrases, there came a passage that had both statesmanship and vision. He said:

'I am a man of peace. You mayn't believe it, but I am. I believe that all American men are at heart men of peace, and I am quite convinced that no American woman is ever again going to vote for the man who may send her sons to fight on foreign soil.'

'But we need to do more than wish for peace,' he continued. 'We must will it. And one of the finest ways of willing it, in my opinion, would be to incorporate in the body of the American Constitution a clause that made it illegal for America to declare war until after a referendum had been taken by the great body of the nation. And it wouldn't be only the old men (the type which declare war so flippantly in Europe) who would vote on that referendum. The young men, the fighters themselves, would vote, and the young women – the sisters and sweethearts – would vote as well. In that way I believe that you would guard against the risk of any war that the nation had not willed with its heart and soul. And if a nation does not will a war with its heart and soul, what is it but slaughter?'

'And then?' I asked him.

'And then, when we had so altered our Constitu-

tion, we could turn to other nations, and say: "If you are in earnest about peace, if you sincerely and honestly wish to avoid unnecessary wars, alter your Constitutions in a similar manner."'

He leant over the table toward me. 'Have you any criticism of *that*, young man?'

I looked at him gravely. 'It is much the best thing you have said yet.'

There was a faintly applauding rustle from the chorus in the background. But I paid no attention to them. I was thinking, thinking furiously. You, in America, can have little idea of the extent to which the cloud of future wars hangs like a blight over Europe's youth. It is a form of creeping paralysis. It checks endeavour, it stultifies ambition. It poisons the whole springs of young existence. What is the use of building, of studying, of looking forward to the years of fruition that must normally follow the years of serving, when at any moment the tempest may be upon us once more?

I remembered walking, a few months before, through an English village. Suddenly in the distance I heard the rattle of lorries, the metallic click, click of soldiers marching. I stepped aside and waited. Soon it was upon me – the 'mechanized' army of which we in England have recently heard so much discussion. Young men tramped forward like robots, their faces masked with gas-masks, their bodies clothed in some complicated apparatus of steel and leather. They seemed brutal and tragically dehumanized. And after them had rolled a monstrous parade of tanks, looking for all the world like those

dragons it was the glory of English heroes in the old days to destroy. They passed by, those young men in the flower of youth, and the world was the sweeter for their passing, since they had been twisted by civilization to grotesque and evil purposes. And when they had gone there was nothing left but a quiet village, and the smoke coming from the cottages and the faint chime from a church.

Would it ever stop? Would peace ever come? And would it come from such men as Thompson? I looked at him again. He was reading aloud from a pamphlet that he had had printed for his 'America First' campaign. Phrase after phrase came drifting across the table, each with a chorus of approval from his attendants.

'Nail Old Glory to her masthead and keep her there.'

'Send to Congress red-blooded Americans.'

'Maintain our national defences in such way that none dare attack us. To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace.'

'To be prepared for war'! At that grisly old lie, which has killed three million young Europeans in the last decade, I almost laughed aloud. So it had all been a dream. That momentary vision of Thompson as a peacemaker was a mere mirage. After all, he was on the side of the old regime, the big battalions, all the hideous apparatus of carnage from which we are so pitifully endeavouring to escape. A moment later he declared his colours beyond any shadow of doubt, by dictating a telegram to a 'pacifist' – (why is that great word a sign of contempt?) – a telegram that was

as brutal (and incidentally as ungrammatical) as was the average recruiting pamphlet during the war.

With that, I left him. I had enjoyed one of the most singular mornings of my life. That he is a demagogue is palpable; nobody but a half-wit could *honestly* have believed in the campaign that he had been conducting. And Mayor Thompson is not a half-wit. He is a shrewd, coarse man, of violent ambitions and few scruples.

And yet, in some ways, a pathetic figure. For, in another age, Thompson might have been great. Set the clock back four hundred years, place him upon a ship with the wind at his back, and what might he not have accomplished? Sir Francis Drake would have counted him among his sturdiest men. The Spaniards would have quailed before him. And if he had survived, Queen Elizabeth herself might have bestowed upon him one of her most gracious smiles, and knighted him, 'Sir William Thompson, Lord Mayor of London.'

P.S.—The following little incident may please all those who feel that I have treated Mayor Thompson unfairly. As soon as I had left his Honour's office, I sought out a stenographer's office in one of Chicago's largest hotels, with the object of dictating, as rapidly as possible, the foregoing incidents and arguments while they were still fresh in my memory. I had not dictated more than three hundred words when, to my great astonishment, the stenographer threw down her pencil, rose to her feet, glared at me ferociously, and said: 'D'you think I'm going to take down that sort of bunk? I happen to be a 100 per

cent. American, and I can tell you that Mayor Thompson's little finger is worth more than any Englishman that ever came over here.'

With which sentiments, I am sure, a great many people would agree.

However, it was all for the best. Her spelling was atrocious.

P.P.S.—Another little incident, even more pleasing. When Mayor Thompson read what I had written about him in an American magazine, he wrote to the man who had arranged the interview and said, 'Next time you send anybody to see me, please do not send a young crook.'

CHAPTER FOUR

The American Prince of Wales

At the risk of leaping too quickly from the ridiculous to the sublime, the next picture which I choose to throw across the screen is that of Lindbergh. For whereas Thompson is typical of all that is worst in America, Lindbergh is typical of all that is best. Besides, Thompson belongs to an age which is rapidly dying, and Lindbergh belongs to a future which is daily stretching out, in more radiant horizons, before the American people.

An Englishman would find it difficult to realize the grip which Lindbergh has upon the national consciousness unless he were to imagine the parallel of the Prince of Wales. Lindbergh's picture is hung up in a million homes. It stares at you from over the reception desks of remote Middle-Western hotels. It is hung at the entrance to railway stations, draped in flags. It smiles at you from the inside of taxi-cabs, it is stuck to the walls of elevators, it brightens the desks of countless stenographers. It is placed in schoolrooms, side by side with Lincoln and Washington. One could not escape it even if one wanted to do so. Personally, I don't, because I find it an extremely agreeable picture.

What is the reason for this amazing mass-adoration, which seems to have become a permanent and integral part of American life? I think that it is due to the fact that Lindbergh represents an ideal which was always at the back of America's mind, but had never previously been personified. America was in

desperate need of a figure-head. She wanted somebody who would express all that she most venerated – youth, energy, courage, and that militant asceticism of which Prohibition is the rather ludicrous symbol. Until Lindbergh arrived, she had nobody who quite fitted that rôle. There were many school-book heroes, of course, and there was always the titanic figure of Lincoln, silhouetted against the national horizon, but there was never anybody who had a universal, unchallengeable appeal.

Then, suddenly, with a whirr of wings, Lindbergh fluttered the pages of American history. The nation took him to its heart and there, unless one is seriously mistaken, his image is permanently engraved. So far, his every action has only served to deepen and intensify that image. I earnestly hope and believe that he will continue what he has so gloriously begun.

For Americans are saying to themselves:

'He is of the future. So are we. He chooses the air as his province, and he has a vision that it is in the air, free and international, that the new civilization will be born. That is our vision too.

'He is unmercenary. That is an example which we would follow. For years we have been waiting for a leader who was not only above corruption but who showed a positive indifference to dollars. We have him now.

'He is ascetic, and yet, he is not ugly. That is, at last, the triumph of the American ideal. Our Puritan morality may be admirable but it is very often hideous, and nearly always ridiculous. But here is a young man who does not drink, nor smoke, nor

womanize, and yet manages to retain his sense of humour, his dazzling smile, his air of adventurous living.'

And so, I fear that it will be with something of a shock that you read the next section, which is the only way in which I can think of introducing Lindbergh without writing in the style of Mr. Harold Bell Wright.

II

'They have found that the Fountain of Youth
Is a mixture of gin and vermouth . . .'

I looked at Lindbergh as he listened to that song. His profile was clearly outlined against the lamplight, and he was gazing at the singer with an expression which baffled me. Was he amused? Bored? Distressed? Did he even understand what it was all about?

I continued to gaze. The room was crowded. Blue spirals of cigarette smoke hung on the air, trembled, dissolved. He was the guest of honour. The song, to a certain extent, was sung for him. We all knew it well. We had heard it in the Rue de Lille, in Chelsea, on the Lido. In lots of expensive places. To a certain extent it expressed our own philosophy. But how did it appeal to him? That was what I was passionately anxious to know, and that was why I continued to gaze.

Fair hair, fresh complexion, hands clasped, eyes clear and watchful. 'A mixture of gin and vermouth.' I leant forward. I believe I saw into his

mind at that moment. If I am right, he was saying something like this . . . 'Gin and vermouth. Yes. Equal parts of these two liquids, if agitated for a period of thirty seconds and brought to a temperature of zero, produce the reaction known as Youth. Good. I'll remember that. And now for the next formula.'

Please, at the outset of this essay, let me disclaim any intention of trying to be funny at the expense of Lindbergh. But you must admit that there was a certain humour in the situation – a certain *grotesquerie* in the spectacle of the Lone Eagle being serenaded in the perverse and blasé accents of the Ritz Bar (Parisian Edition). So, at least, it seemed to me. And I recalled the other occasions on which I had seen Lindbergh. Why were all of them so very incongruous?

The first was in London, at the Albert Hall ball which was given in his honour immediately after he had shot, like a rocket, into the ken of Europe. I was standing in a box which contained, besides myself, such minor figures as the Prince of Wales, Lord Lonsdale, Sir Philip Sassoon, and Lindbergh.

He was standing by the Prince. A thousand eyes were directed to him. Round him, like a flock of scarlet parrots, played the ladies of London. My unnaturally sensitive nostrils sensed the perfumes of Lentheric, of Chanel, of Molyneux, and I regret to say, of Pinaud. My unnaturally sensitive ears also sensed the idiotic phrases of – but we need name no names. And what sense had I of Lindbergh? Something which rose far above the perfumes. Something

almost embarrassingly fresh. Something – (forgive me, O Democracy) – something Royal.

I can illustrate my meaning by a little incident which occurred on this occasion. A very exalted woman entered the box, glaring, I may add, at me, for I had no sort of right to be there. Having glared, and having breathed, and adjusted herself and done all the other things which such women do in moments of social emotion, she advanced to the Prince of Wales and swept him a curtsy. And then, she turned to Lindbergh, and quite instinctively, without any *arrière-pensée*, and most certainly without any thought of doing anything conspicuous, she curtsied to him as well.

That seemed to me at the time, and seems to me still, a perfect example of the divinity that doth hedge a king. Until I met Lindbergh I was under the impression that only kings had it. But Lindbergh has it too.

Our first conversation was royal enough – because neither of us had anything to say. It took place at the top of a skyscraper during a party. He had been introduced to hundreds of adoring women and was feeling weary. So was I. We went away and sat behind a screen. I said to him:

'Don't you ever feel you want to rush away and hide behind a tree?'

He looked at me gravely and made no reply.

My question suddenly seemed rather foolish. I changed it. 'I mean, don't you get absolutely fed up with the whole thing?'

'Why, no. I wouldn't say that.'

'Then do you *like* it?'

'I wouldn't say that, either.'

If anybody but Lindbergh had given me those two answers I should have uttered the one word 'whoops' and swept away. But his silence was not the silence of the dumb but of the eloquent. And he gave me a proof of that eloquence later on in the evening, talking of his life in language which was as clear and simple as his own flights. Incidentally, he told me the funniest story I have ever heard, concerning a question which was asked of him by an European monarch. But that is not for publication.

III

A great many Americans, who pride themselves on their sophistication, have said to me, 'Lindbergh is merely a flying machine. He is clean and charming, and all that, but he has absolutely no vision. He merely does a "stunt," finishes it, and prepares for the next. It means no more to him than a prize-fight to Jack Dempsey – probably a good deal less.'

That is nonsense. I do not blame my friends for thinking it, because Lindbergh has never made articulate the visions which inspire him. But they are there. And to prove it, one need only mention that his flight to Mexico – a master-gesture of international conciliation – originated entirely in his own head, and was planned only for the purpose of improving relations between the two countries. To Lindbergh, the air is international, the air is pure, the air alone is free from the blood and sweat of fools.

And in the air, too, he feels that the old civilization may be cleansed and sweetened, by winds that know no language and no barrier, that blow impartially on the faces of just and unjust alike.

It was during this same Mexican flight that I learnt what I imagine to be the secret of his success – his amazing power of concentration. I was in New York with one of his greatest friends, who had just returned from seeing him off at Washington. As we sat there, speculating as to how he was faring, my host drew for me a vivid picture of Lindbergh as he had set out.

'He woke me up early,' he said, 'and told me that he was starting for Mexico at noon. He said it quite casually, as though he were speaking of a luncheon engagement. The only thing which was not casual about him was his request that he should not be worried by telegrams or letters or telephone messages. "I don't want to see anybody or hear from anybody – whoever they may be –", he said. "I want to be alone with my machine."'

'During the next three hours,' continued his friend, 'Lindbergh gave me a lesson in concentration which I shall never forget. He had hardly told me of his desire for solitude before a special messenger arrived, armed with a letter from Kellog, the Secretary of State. "Put it on the file," said Lindbergh, and went on with his work. A batch of telegrams formed the next interruption. "Put them on the file," said Lindbergh. Somebody suggested that at least he ought to have one of us read them, in case they contained anything of vital importance.

Lindbergh looked up for a moment, and said, "There's only one important thing in my life at the moment, and that's flying to Mexico." All the time, letters, telegrams, special messengers were arriving. Lindbergh paid less attention to them than he would have paid to the buzzing of a fly against the window-pane. He went straight ahead with his job. As a result, he was ready at the moment when he had said he would be ready.'

It transpired, later on, that Lindbergh was well advised to pay no heed to the communications of the outer world. Among those telegrams were many distracting influences. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, had thought fit to send many passionate protests to this unorthodox young man for proposing to disgrace himself by flying to a country which had ventured to question the value and integrity of its priesthood.

Another Lindbergh mystery was solved for me during that conversation. I had read in some newspaper that he had prepared for those long flights by training himself to dispense with sleep. According to the newspaper he would sleep for eight hours on Monday, seven on Tuesday, six on Wednesday, and so on, until he eventually arrived at a physiological condition which demanded practically no sleep at all. That theory has puzzled me considerably, and I was glad to learn that it was merely a journalistic invention. Lindbergh's actual procedure was entirely different. For several days before his Mexican flight he had gone to bed every night at ten o'clock and had slept for ten hours. He had had so much sleep that

he was fed up with sleeping and wanted to stay awake all night.

With every wish to maintain my Bostonian reputation as a flippant and decadent person, I am forced to admit that Lindbergh is to me something much more than a figure of mechanical genius, something much finer than a clean-living boy who does not smoke cigarettes. He has taken to himself the chivalry which once fluttered in the pennants of a knight-at-arms, and has given it wings of silver. He has recaptured the echo which once throbbed from a vanguard drum, and has caught it in the throb of a powerful machine. In all of those breathless flights, those rapturous passages of sea and sky, there has been something of the spirit of the Crusades.

So that when I played him my most immoral song, 'Libido Baby,' I had only to catch his eyes to turn quickly into the more appropriate measure of 'My Heart Stood Still.'

CHAPTER FIVE

Swanson on Skyscrapers

Dance, Dance, Dance Little Lady,
Youth is fleeting
To the rhythm beating
In your brain. . . .

(*Any Noel Coward Revue*).

So far, we have considered in these pages only the grotesque and the heroic. Let us now contemplate the beautiful. Let us in fact contemplate Miss Gloria Swanson.

I choose her for two reasons – firstly because I met her very soon after I returned from the bosom of Mayor Thompson, and secondly because her reaction to New York was precisely similar to my own.

Yet, as I contemplate the white sheet of paper before me, bearing only these words and the title names, still glistening with wet ink, I feel nervous. I feel that I should write in coloured inks, that golden asterisks should flicker between my paragraphs. I feel that I should plunge my hand into a Press agent's waste-paper basket, drag up a fistful of hot and splendid adjectives, and hurl them sparkling across the page. I feel, in short, that I should write in movie prose, which is precisely what I am about to do, for almost the first thing she ever said to me was one of the best movie captions ever composed: –

'My life is like a street, and I never know when I shall cross that street. All I know is that when I have crossed it, I am a different person. And when

that moment comes, the crowds drift away, and there is nothing but myself in the middle of the road, and a lamp-post, shining against a sky that is dark and without a star.'

That is a sufficiently remarkable thing for any woman to say. But when it is said by a beautiful woman, to a stranger, against a background of glittering, angular dancers, and through the din of a hoarse and throbbing jazz-band, it is not only remarkable but unique.

Here, therefore, at the outset, is my first Press agent's statement: 'Gloria Swanson is unique. She is not one woman but two. The first Miss Swanson is the movie Miss Swanson, passionate, vibrant, volatile, possessing all those qualities which are conventionally associated with the standard type of tzigane who has kicked a shapely heel through countless columns of the *Saturday Evening Post*. The second Miss Swanson is the real Miss Swanson, brooding, aloof, with a philosophy of her own – the Miss Swanson who retires to a solitary study, draws the curtains, with a shudder, to shut out the myraid gleaming eyes of the city, and takes a book to the fire.'

Could anybody write better Press agent stuff? And yet, it is true. For once in a way, the Press agent is justified in his legend.

Exercise your imagination, and turn on the hands of the clock one hour. Close your eyes and see us together – she, rather pale and lovely, clad in something that seems to be jade, with a turban. And as a background, imagine some wide windows, high up,

and the long, distant glittering of an insane city beneath. And hear me saying to her:

'It is all this which makes us mad.'

'I know. One becomes dehumanized.'

'Why do we do it?'

'We can't help ourselves. We're in the grip of a machine. Don't you long for trees, and a wind that doesn't smell of petrol, and peace?'

'If you knew!'

You see? Press agent stuff again! Yet – it happened. Most eloquently, on that exclusive roof, did she discuss the life mechanical. She stood there, a cigarette to her lips, and in a soft, rather husky voice, she ripped the veils from the painted face of Civilization. She showed how the lights of Broadway are blinding the kind eyes of youth – how the hard lines of Park Avenue are hemming in the march of the ideal – how – oh, you know it all.

She flattened her nose against the window and looked out. Opposite us was a lone, naked skyscraper. She apostrophized it: 'How straight it is, and cold and dead, and how straight and cold and dead it makes everybody who lives in it. When I see a building like that, with lights shining in every tiny window, I sometimes think of those huge tropical plants that live on insects – one sees their sticky leaves covered with flies, and gradually the flies are drained of colour as the thing takes their blood. Skyscrapers are just like those plants. They drain their inhabitants of colour, and gradually kill them. *Half the people in that building are dead!*'

She looked at me with fear in her eyes. Half the

people in that building are dead! The phrase had that queer ring of fatality which sometimes sounds, like a funeral bell, in the prose of Dostoevsky. It was the very last phrase which I should have expected from Gloria Swanson – the lady of coloured flickering lights.

I did not sleep well that night. Partly because I had been induced to take coffee, but principally because I was turning in my mind the latter part of our conversation. We had switched – as one does switch – to religion. Religious conversations are not always exciting, but this had excited me, because in her confession I had recognized my own. 'I can't accept any religion that is offered to me. I long for it, but the very strength of my longing is inclined to fight against me, because if I ever forced myself to an acceptance of any religion I should know that I had merely believed because the desire to believe had overcome me.'

Even the comforts of theosophy had been denied her, for she had never been convinced of the existence of personality apart from living matter. The most for which she could hope was for some form of amalgamation, after death, with the universal – so that she might be a faint vibration in the ultimate symphony. My words are high-falutin', but I cannot help that. And since the subject is vast, and fruitless, and troubling, let us pass on to the next morning, when, after a few hours godless sleep, I called upon Miss Swanson for lunch.

We seated ourselves. The restaurant was crowded

and the babel was agonizing. Scream, clatter, yell, screech, howl, shout, bellow, bang, smash. One would have said that somebody had entered the monkey house at the Zoo, armed with a red-hot poker which he was applying to the monkeys' posteriors. But no. The ladies of New York were only indulging in a little polite conversation. However, when they do that in any considerable number the result is loud enough to lower the walls of any Jericho. In fact, I am quite certain that if New York ever falls, it will fall not because of any earthquake or battle, but because somebody gives a lunch to too many society women.

I looked at her hopelessly. 'This is unbearable,' I shrieked.

She made a sign, through the din, that she agreed.

Summoning up all the available air into my lungs I shouted across the table: 'Have you ever tried putting your fingers in your ears?'

She shook her head.

'Try it,' I howled. 'It's marvellous.'

She put her fingers to her ears. So did I. We kept them there. For a moment I closed my eyes. The peace was infinitely welcome. The babel was only a dull roar now. One could hear oneself breathing. Slowly I opened my eyes. As I did so I caught sight of a man at the opposite table. He was staring at me with an expression of terror. So was his wife, whose arm he had seized. So, as I suddenly realized, were a great many people. They evidently thought we were mad, and might begin to throw knives at them. For the first time in several months I blushed.

CHAPTER FIVE

I tried to think of a way of removing one's fingers from one's ears with nonchalance, as though one had not really meant it. No such way occurred to me. And so I brought down my hands to my lap sharply, like a military salute. So did Miss Swanson.

It was not till after lunch that we could talk. Her mind seemed to me as alert then as on the preceding night, which isn't a bad test. Let me recall some of her ideas:

Concerning age. 'When I grow old, I want to have an old brain as well as an old body. I shall pray for wrinkles in my spirit to match the wrinkles on my face. I shall pray for the fire to die down in my brain just as it dies down in my body. . . .'

Concerning the Women of America. 'Half of the women of America are sex-starved. Their husbands cease to be lovers almost as soon as they are married. They may go on creating children, but that is merely a mechanical process which doesn't satisfy even though it may exhaust. And the sex-starvation of those women is the explanation of a hundred American phenomena which might otherwise puzzle you. It explains their strange crusades, their extraordinary cliques and fetishes. It lies at the back of the vast enthusiasm for women's clubs, which exists in no European country. To me there is something infinitely pathetic about those women's clubs – huddling together, as if for warmth. . . .'

Concerning Definitions of Life. 'A woman asked me yesterday to define life. I said that life was emotion. She didn't understand. I corrected myself and said that emotion was the most important thing in life,

and I gave her a simple example. I said, "If you were to discover that a friend whom you had trusted had been stealing from you, which would have the greater effect upon you, the loss of the money or the emotion caused by its loss?" '

Concerning the Subconscious. 'It was not Freud who taught me the importance of the subconscious. I had analysed myself long before it became the fashion. I have been married three times – my first marriage was at sixteen – and if I had not analysed myself I should have gone mad. Yet even now, I know that I am still full of childish inhibitions. I never think of a policeman as a protector, only as a man who will try to persecute me.'

Concerning her Art. 'The subconscious plays a most important part in my work. When I am acting, I will do some piece of business without having any idea that I am doing it. The producer will call out "That's good, do that again." But I shan't have any idea what I did, and often I may not be able to do it again. That is why I know that I am a very difficult person to act with.'

'I expect that you have heard that an actress becomes so absorbed in a part that she acts it off the stage as well as on. That is true of my work. When I was playing Sadie Thompson in "Rain" I became Sadie Thompson entirely. I forgot my manners. I came down to dinner looking exactly like her. I am told that I even talked like her. This isn't a pose or an attempt to appear "temperamental"; it merely happens to be a rather interesting fact.'

I might go on indefinitely, but I won't. I think I

have said enough to show that Gloria Swanson is a woman with a keener and more masculine intelligence than that of many men. For me, she shattered a legend – the legend that movie actresses of her genre have only two moods – either 'the lilies and languors of virtue' or 'the roses and rapture of vice.' Gloria Swanson moves in a land of far stranger and far more subtle flowers. And to me the tragedy of her life – and of my life and of everybody else's in this age – is that she cannot stoop to pick them.

CHAPTER SIX

Ad Astra?

THE last chapter was called 'Swanson on Skyscrapers.' It might just as well have been called 'Skyscrapers on Swanson.' For it is abundantly evident that these buildings were pressing heavily on her mind.

It is time that the skyscraper 'complex' was seriously analysed. So far we have only flirted with it. Physicians refer vaguely to the possibility of heightened blood-pressure, nerve-specialists mutter a few platitudes about dizziness and insomnia. The only people who seem to show any particular interest are foreign militarists, who lick their lips at the thought of the titanic slaughter which they could accomplish in the space of three minutes, given a squadron of aeroplanes and an adequate supply of explosives.

Yet, the skyscraper 'complex' exists. I have had it myself and it is as embarrassing as sea-sickness. At the moment of writing, I am cured, – indeed, I am longing to take once more the journey to the stars, to lean out of a window and throw darts at the moon, to feel that superb sense of exhilaration which comes to all those who have suffered from the terror of the heights, and have conquered it.

But in the old days it was very different. When arriving at some new hotel, I would pause before choosing my room. Should it be high up or low down? If it was high up one knew that there would be a long way to fall when the building collapsed.

If, on the other hand, it was low down, one would be crushed beneath a far heavier weight of masonry. So, between the two, I usually chose something near the middle. And even so, as soon as I got into the elevator, I would look round for some projecting piece of woodwork to which one could cling when the elevator broke, because I had a theory that if you were clinging to a piece of wood during the collapse of an elevator, you might keep a few bones in your body still intact when the crash comes.

If that is the effect which skyscrapers had upon a nature not particularly neurotic, what effect must they have upon the really nervous? One would have thought that their minds would be perpetually tortured. One would have imagined that the sidewalks would resound with dull thuds all day long, as quantities of gibbering women leapt into space from the thirtieth floor. One would have supposed that nets would have to be placed to receive the falling, and Central Park be turned into a vast emergency hospital of tented shelters to accommodate those who did not dare, any more, to go to bed at home.

Yet none of these things appear to happen. From the few statistics which I have been able to gather, there are fewer deaths caused by jumping out of windows in New York than in London. Let us, therefore, turn aside, for a moment, from the neurotics, and consider the ordinary everyday people – the Mrs. Smiths of New York.

I have heard two quite opposite theories with regard to the effect of the skyscraper upon Mrs.

Smith. The first is this – that residence in a skyscraper tremendously intensifies her individuality. Mrs. Smith, forced to ascend every day to the twentieth floor, where she owns an apartment precisely similar to five hundred apartments in the same building, decorated on the wholesale system, utterly removed from the natural, lovely things of the earth – Mrs. Smith is yet a woman, and she has a soul. And so, say the first school of theorists, she draws into herself, creates a protective husk against her neighbours, and as she closes her front door (simultaneously with the closing of five hundred other front doors in the building), she mentally annihilates her neighbours, above her, below her, around her. She goes to the window and she looks out over the great city, stretching in valleys and ravines below her, and she tells it to go to hell. She walks through her little apartment and she says 'this is mine, *mine*, and not all the millions of New York can take it away from me.'

The other school of theorists see it from a very different point of view. Theirs is the belief which apparently animated the creators of that remarkable German film *Metropolis*. They see these skyscrapers set as in a ballet, with vast crowds revolving mechanically in and out of them, moving like clockwork, their arms and legs making stilted gestures, their minds moulded in the manner of marionettes. They see a hundred Mrs. Smiths walking, in strict time, to the door of the elevator. It is opened by a man with a face like a mask. A light blinks, a bell rings, the elevator leaps skywards. In it stand a hundred

Mrs. Smiths, their hands to their sides, their eyes like the eyes of dolls. The elevator stops, the Mrs. Smiths alight, and depart swiftly, silently, rhythmically through the uniform doors of their apartments. And then, what? The theorists do not tell us. But if one could extend their theories, if one could cut one of those buildings in half, and show a hundred little apartments glistening with lights, I know that they would expect to see their Mrs. Smiths, sitting in just the same places, staring before them with just the same expression in their eyes.

The advocates of this latter theory are principally Europeans, who are obviously ignorant of the facts. For if they expect to catch any American woman sitting down, moulding herself according to her neighbour, failing to express herself with the utmost candour upon every conceivable subject, they are in for a sad disillusionment. You could enclose ten thousand American women in ten thousand rabbit-hutches for ten years, and feed them on precisely the same diet, and they would emerge at the end of that period more refreshingly individualistic than ever.

No, – a person who would be neurotic in a sky-scraper would be far more neurotic in a London lodging-house. For here one sees life through dreary windows, as in a cracked glass, darkly. One sees it through a shadow of desolation which lifts only for a few days in midsummer. And those days only serve to intensify the gloom of the rest of the year. The people who talk about the nerve strain of New York as compared with London are fundamentally wrong. Both cities, needless to say, cause a nervous

strain in anybody who happens to have any nerves. Everything in life is a nervous strain – the chirping of a sparrow, the opening of a letter, the buzz of a telephone. But it is only in moments of extreme neurosis that any sane man would unfavourably compare, in its effect upon the nervous system, the bright vigour of New York with the melancholy apathy of London.

To me, too, it is a false sentimentality which sees in a London street a more potent inspiration for the artist – or, if you will, the lover – than in New York. A tiresome woman once informed me, on the thirtieth story of a New York hotel, that had we been in London she would have 'given' herself to me, but here, in ugly New York, etc., etc. . . . It was with difficulty that I restrained myself from saying that she would not have given herself to me, even if we had been in Timbuctoo, firstly because one cannot give anything to anybody if he has no intention of receiving it, secondly because any woman who talks about 'giving' herself is using a ridiculously inaccurate phrase, which irritates me, and thirdly because, if I had wished to indulge in that particular form of amusement, I should infinitely have preferred to stage it in a skyscraper than in Mayfair. For a skyscraper is the most exquisite setting for a passionate love-affair which has yet been devised by man.

Why does no great novelist realize this obvious fact? The scene is set ready for him – he has only to make his puppets move. Think of the lofty dawns which he might cause to break into the rooms

of his imagination, the secret twilights, high in the clouds, with which he might enwrap his lovers! Into those uplifted chambers he could pour moonbeams untarnished by any earthly contact, in those soaring spaces he could stage a dance more dizzy than any which ever whirled over the flat surface of the earth.

And if I go on like this, I shall come perilously near to those Anglican bishops about whom we were so bitter in a preceding chapter. Let me therefore recall some of my happier moments in the tall buildings of New York, beginning with a picture of three people facing a problem of deep significance to the people of America.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Lovers of Lorelei

THROUGH the high window of an apartment in the Plaza Hotel, a sharp finger of New York sunlight pointed to a pile of gentlemen preferring blondes. They were preferring them in every language. My eye, lazily roving, caught the titles *Blondmen Bevorzugt*, *Herrer Liker Blonde Piker*, *Muzi Mazi Radsi Blondynky*, *Herrar Tycker Bast om Blondmer*.

The finger of sunlight also pointed to three figures – Miss Loos, her husband, and myself. They were in dressing-gowns and pyjamas; I was faultlessly attired in grey. We were all quite silent, because a Great Truth had just been uttered in that room, and the effect of it had not yet worn off.

The truth was this: Barely ten per cent. of the Great American Public who flocked to buy *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* had the faintest idea of what the book was all about.

They thought that it was a 'sweet' book. They thought that it was a 'cute' book. They thought that Lorelei was a nice kittenish little thing who loved to have a good time. It never occurred to them that there was anything a little *risqué* about her. The Great American Public, you see, have not got such nasty minds as you or I.

The silence continued. I thought of all those serried rows of her book which one sees in every drug-store, hanging in the shadow of hot-water bottles and bath-towels. I thought of the vast piles

which one observed at the railway stations, under placards proclaiming the glad news that 'Anita Loos Is Now Seventy-five Cents.' And I thought of the armies of young women who bury their noses in the pages of that book, apparently obtaining no sharper sensation than that afforded by a cheap and faded perfume.

I broke the silence. 'It's incredible. They must have seen *some* of the point of it.'

Miss Loos stirred in her arm-chair. Her lips set in a firm line. 'Very well,' she said, 'listen to this.'

She stretched out her hand to the desk and grasped a letter. She read it slowly and deliberately. It was from an old lady in the Middle West. It thanked her, simply but fervently, for her 'beautiful book,' and it ended by saying: 'The reason I love it is because it reminded me of my daughter, who is dead.'

I looked at her, she looked at me, I looked at John Emerson, and we all looked at the ceiling. Then there was silence again.

Once more I broke the silence. 'But that's only one example.'

'There are hundreds more,' she said wearily.

'Thousands,' said Emerson.

'For instance . . .' she pointed a finger at me, and told me this astounding tale.

Once upon a time the grey-headed principal of a Far Western branch of the Y.M.C.A. picked up a little book. As he read it, a gentle smile illuminated his features. He became permeated with the spirit of Pure Young Womanhood. This, he felt, was a book with a message. It was obviously the book for

which his Young Men had been waiting. And so he sat down and wrote to the authoress (whose name, Anita Loos, struck him as pleasantly virginal). He requested her, of her kindness, to send a copy of the book to the Y.M.C.A. library. He added that the value of the book would be greatly enhanced if she would write some inspiring inscription on the title page.

Whereupon Miss Loos, with a sigh, reached for a copy of the thousandth edition, and wrote: 'Kissing your hand may make you feel very good, but a diamond bracelet lasts forever.'

Silence again. I looked out of the window. This was a topsy-turvy land. All round me were mountain ranges of skyscrapers. Their heads glistened arrogantly in the sunlight. They were the creations of giants rather than of men. Yet those very giants now appeared to have been fooled by Lorelei, even when Lorelei was stripped naked before them, and danced a comic and outrageous measure beneath their eyes. Hadn't they even noticed the vulgarity of the dance? To put it more directly, hadn't their suspicions been aroused by the very style of the book, its delicious errors in spelling, its chaotic punctuation?

I put my question into words. And then came another staggering revelation.

'To prove to you exactly how far the public, even the women, misunderstood the book,' said Miss Loos, 'I shall tell you a story about a woman's club in –. They asked me to be the guest of honour at one of their weekly meetings. I went. They said a

great many charming things. And then the secretary rose to her feet and proceeded to read long extracts from my book, correcting all the grammatical errors which were in it . . .'

'You don't mean to say . . .' I began.

'I do. For instance, instead of saying "I hope for your sake you are a Christian Science," the secretary would cough, pause for a second and say "I hope for your sake you are a Christian Scient*ist*." And then she would glance at me with an apologetic little smile as though she were saying that she was correcting my prose for my own good, because after all, a girl has to get educated somehow.'

I gasped for breath. I said that I knew the women's clubs of America fairly well. Their members had always seemed sophisticated and intelligent. Was it possible that they could be so entirely blind? Yes, said Miss Loos, it was. 'Then who *did* understand?' I asked. 'Was it only the maidens of Hollywood and their like?'

'They were the worst of all. When the book was being filmed we naturally considered it essential that the girl who played Lorelei, however nice she was herself, should at least have some indication of Lorelei's morals. But when we came to interview the girls we discovered that they hadn't an inkling of what it was all about. This was the sort of dialogue that took place:

Miss Loos: Do you like the character of Lorelei?

X: Oh yes! She's my *favourite* character.

Miss Loos: Do you think she was a nice girl?

X: Oh yes. I think she was just sweet!

Miss Loos: But – I mean – nice?

X: Why, yes!

Miss Loos: (In desperation) . . .?

X: Why no! I'm sure she couldn't have done what you say!

This was all so amazing that I tactlessly said out loud what I had been secretly thinking. I said, 'The Great American Public must be either very pure or very simple.'

'Quite. And so is the Great European Public.'

At that I felt inclined to protest – not at the stigma of simplicity, but at the stigma of purity. After all, we are brought up in a tradition of the best courtesans. At school the briefest acquaintanceship with European diplomacy introduces us to an endless gallery of kings' mistresses. Not so in America. In America, presidents do not have mistresses, or if they do, they don't get into the history books.

Yet, in spite of this, in spite of the bright-lipped women that jostle us, from boyhood, in the street, in spite of the yellow-covered volumes which spring up, like fungi, in every bookshop, in spite of a universal license of conversation which, one imagines, would inform the shyest debutante in the dullest London season of the precise technique of Lorelei's craft, the point of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* has been missed in Vienna and in Paris to almost as great an extent as in New York and in Chicago. A slightly larger proportion, it is true, have understood it, but even that proportion has failed to grasp the humour and has taken it as a serious attack on Young Womanhood.

I could find no better illustration than a letter from

an Austrian woman which Miss Loos had received that morning:–

'Madam: An author is exposed to critic. Will you excuse an Austrian lady not to admire in your clever book, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, the cruel way you ridicule London, Paris, and Vienna and seem only to have met men and women with little morality. Still, I hope that the Saints we worship and whom we give birthday parties to your idea, will help you to complete recovery from your operation.'

That letter raises another aspect of the problem. It gives the book a deeper colour, turns it from an exquisite cobweb to a net of steel. And this, I gather (*not* from Miss Loos or her entourage), was the way in which it was suggested to her that the movie should be directed. Mr. Spoffard, that divine fool, was to become a pillar of society, a fine muscular Christian. Lorelei herself was to be Rose-pink Innocence battling against the snares of the world. I tremble to think what they would have done to Mr. Eismann. One feels that at least he would have been given horns and a tail. Fortunately, Miss Loos has tenacity, and a good deal of the book remains.

So much for the book and the public. I can best sum it up by quoting her own words: 'I think that I should be right in guessing that about ten per cent. of my readers had any idea of what I was talking about.'

Now for the book and its author. I myself think it a great book. To me it is as subtle as anything Jane Austen ever wrote. I open the book at random

to find Lorelei standing in the middle of the Place Vendôme, and I read the sentence: 'If you turn your back on a monument they have in the middle, you can see none other than Coty's sign.' What a world of observation is contained in that turning of the back! Even the characters who make no appearance at all are more vivid than many another author's creations after one has read a whole volume about their worst complexes. Miss Chapman (Mrs. Spoffard's nurse) never even comes on to the stage, and yet I could write you a full-length biography about her.

'Did you eliminate an immense amount of material? Did you cut out and go on cutting out? Did you write four pages in order to obtain a single paragraph?' I asked her those questions in a vain endeavour to discover the secret of her technique.

She shook her head. 'No. It's just like this. If I'm limited to two hundred words, I can say anything about anybody. If I have to use one thousand words I feel speechless. It's as natural to me to compress as it is for other authors to overflow.'

'But that deliberate understatement . . .' I insisted. I turned round for a copy of the book and found a sentence which had always seemed to me the most masterly example of *prècis*-writing in modern literature. It concerns Lorelei's adventure with a diamond merchant on the voyage home. I cleared my throat, fixed Miss Loos with an eagle eye, and read: 'So I met the gentleman, and we went around quite a lot, but we had quite a quarrel the night before we landed. So I did not even bother to look at

him when I came down the gangplank, and I put the unset diamonds in my handbag so I did not have to declare them at the customs.'

'Now,' I said sternly, 'that sentence *must* have taken a whole morning to write. It contains three comedies, two adventure stories, and a tragedy. I cannot believe . . .'

'But honestly.' She sat bolt upright, and observed me with a look of outraged innocence. 'It came out without any preparation at all. I tell you, I'm like that.'

'Thank heaven you are.'

'As for the characterization,' she added, 'all I did was to set down what was all "round me in Hollywood." I didn't create those characters. They were there. I could introduce you to scores of Loreleis . . .'

'Please – not that.'

'And scores of Dorothys,' she went on. 'I could show you a dozen Mr. Eismanns lunching within a few yards of each other. As for the Spoffards! I had nothing to do with creating them. That was done for me.'

I arose greatly refreshed from this conversation, which continued on the same lines for a considerable period. I am so used to authors who claim that their characters come to them in visions, of dramatists who pretend to suffer agonies of travail over the creation even of a butler, that this cool and diffident explanation of the birth of a masterpiece was a welcome contrast.

The last time I met her she handed me a letter

which showed me beyond a doubt that she was speaking the bare truth, that Hollywood contained even stranger creatures than Mrs. Spoffard, that it was indeed a place where the truth was stranger than fiction. Here is the letter:

Miss Anita Loos,

With best regard I send you this simple letter of mine in order to communicate with you.

My real purpose is nothing but to have one of your everlasting picture. I was so actracted (*sic*) with your bravery, and, so I wanted to see it. Please sent (*sic*) it very quickly for I need it badly.

Yours trully,

The signature ought, of course, to have been Lorelei, but it wasn't. I gather that it was the signature of one of those Napoleons of Commerce who have made Hollywood – well, what it is.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A Little Vice

MISS LOOS had made me think. If *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* had been so strangely misunderstood, was it because Lorelei, as a public character, had been blotted out of the official consciousness of America? And if that was the case, who was responsible for the blotting out?

I put this question to a friend who had rather more than his share of sophistication, and he informed me that the best person to answer my question would be the head of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice. And so, with the ardour of the crusader, I departed to rout out this gentleman, feeling, I must confess, a little ridiculous in doing so.

It was on a dark and dreary afternoon in November that I set out to storm the headquarters of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice. I could not have chosen a more suitable day. Fog, like a shabby blanket, had drawn itself over the city in the morning, and as the hours went by, the blanket slipped away and the rain began to fall. In New York rain really does 'fall.' In London it splutters, in Paris it dances, but in New York it falls – hopelessly, despairingly.

I was a little nervous. The New York Society for the Suppression of Vice sounded so very grand. There was a sonorous ring about the title that suggested an army on the march. I saw myself, small and vicious, walking through halls of white marble beneath the scornful eyes of a hundred muscular

virgins. I saw myself stripped naked by the guardians of virtue. I almost began to feel in my pockets to make sure that I was not carrying improper postcards. For you see, I had been banned in Boston, and on such occasions one remembers that sort of thing.

And then – I arrived. As I stepped from the taxi I found myself in a mean street, outside a low and scabrous house. I blinked suspiciously at my driver. I said 'I wanted the New York Society for the – '

'Yeah. Spreshun o' vice. Well, you got it.' He pointed to the door, and spat, with exquisite precision, in its direction. 'And,' he grinned, 'yer welcome.'

With which, the sweet creature departed.

I stood in the rain and looked up at the house. To my shame, it occurred to me that it looked like one of 'those' houses. It only needed a red light to . . . But what was I doing to be harbouring such thoughts? I frowned, plucked up my courage, and knocked at the door.

It was opened. I found myself in a small room so dirty that I instantly wished I could instil into the Society a realization of the necessity of suppressing dust as well as vice. I was asked to sit down. I sat down. And with my usual bad taste, proceeded to glare about me.

The *pièce de résistance* was a picture on the wall of a lady in rose pink tulle. She was throwing a flower to somebody from a balcony. I was about to congratulate the clerk on the skill with which the artist had delineated the symbols of lunacy in her features when

my eye rested on another picture. It was so thickly coated with dust that I could hardly trace the features. But they seemed vaguely familiar. Who was it? A Suppressor or a Suppressed? Devil or Angel? Satan or . . . Good Lord! It was George Washington!

I rose to my feet. I approached the clerk. I looked at the picture. I happen to have a filial respect for George Washington and I think that people who hang up his picture should at least endeavour to keep it clean. I hold this opinion so strongly that I was about to impart it to the clerk. But I did not do so. For at that moment, the door opened, and the Suppressor-in-Chief came in.

Now, I am bound to confess that I was extremely disappointed in the appearance of Mr. Sumner – for that was his name. I had hoped for a fanatic and I was greeted by a business man. I had expected a pale face, and hot, burning eyes, had anticipated a voice that rasped down the scale of the vices and fluted, with a hypocrite's sweetness, up the scale of the virtues. Instead, I heard a quiet, cultured voice, the sort of voice that sells one bonds, or discusses with one the latest novel of Mr. Theodore Dreiser.

We sat down. I felt supremely ridiculous. I could not begin by saying 'I've always been terribly interested in vice,' because I haven't. Nor could I say 'I hope you have caught lots of vicious people to-day,' because I didn't. Besides, I have never been able to decide what vice really is. Most people seem to associate it exclusively with sexual excesses. That seems the least important of all forms of vice. To me, really vicious people rank in the following order:

1. People who go away for a holiday, shut up their apartments, and send their cats out into the street to starve. I should like to see such people torn to pieces by rats.

2. People who turn round in the street to stare at hunchbacks.

3. People who believe that to spare the rod is to spoil the child.

4. People who persecute those who are mentally warped – the judge who sends hair-slashers to prison, the officers who spat in the faces of conscientious objectors during the war.

However, I could go on with that catalogue for ever. We must return to Mr. Sumner.

I said: 'I have been making rather a study of the censorship lately. Can you tell me the exact position with regard to the censorship over here?'

'We have no official censorship. It is left to public opinion.'

'And how does public opinion work?'

'Through various bodies, of which this is one.'

'Can you actually suppress a book?'

'We can bring it to the notice of the authorities, who can take legal action.'

'What books have you suppressed lately?'

Mr. Sumner thought for a moment. 'One of the worst,' he said, 'was a book called *Janet March* by Floyd Dell. It was brought to my notice by a friend. I read it, and came to the conclusion that it was unadulterated filth. I showed it to the district attorney, who agreed, and sent for the publisher. The book was instantly withdrawn.

'What was it about?'

'The theme concerned a woman who decided that the only way she could express her personality was to offer herself to every man who came along.'

'I see. What others?'

'Well . . .'

'Did you try to do anything about *The Green Hat*?'

'*The Green Hat*? No. It was suggested to me, of course, but we did not feel that we could get a conviction.'

'Yet you would hardly call that a moral book, would you?'

'Certainly not. But the immorality is suggested rather than stated. And sometimes a magistrate is not too eager to read between the lines.'

'And *The President's Daughter*? I should have thought a book which showed an ex-President of the United States to have lived with a woman other than his wife, over a period of years, would have been the first to be suppressed.'

'We have not taken action over that book,' said Mr. Sumner.

I did not take notes of any other suppressed books or plays. However, I remember that Mr. Sumner told me he had suppressed a magazine called *Snappy Stories*, and a minute later added that he had been instrumental in the suppression of that beautiful and delicate play, *The Captive* – a play whose only fault lay on the side of reticence.

It was through our discussion on *The Captive* that I became interested in the working of Mr. Sumner's mind. I caught sight of a pile of paper-covered

books lying on the mantelpiece. Some of the covers seemed to me rather attractive. There was one with a charming little woman, clad in black stockings and very little else, kicking a brightly-painted balloon.

'What are those?' I asked.

'Spanish trash!'

I picked one up and opened it. I read something like 'Amando con callores ma dio pallandra.' (Which means nothing at all.)

'Is it all trash?' I asked.

'Certainly.'

I turned another page. Then, in as mild a voice as possible – 'How do you know?'

Mr. Sumner looked almost annoyed. 'How do we *know*? How do we . . .'

I interrupted him. 'Of course,' I said, 'I don't read Spanish myself. So I'm not really qualified to judge.'

'I think you may satisfy yourself that we act on the advice of people who *are* qualified to judge.'

'I see.' There was a pause. Then, as brightly as possible, 'What about the streets?'

'I don't think that you will find much to censor, to-day, in the streets of New York,' said Mr. Sumner.

'Then where have they all gone?'

'Who?'

'The women.'

Mr. Sumner wanted a moment to allow me to realize the full coarseness of my remark. Then he said, 'There are, unfortunately, places where they still collect.'

'Many?'

'Yes,' said Mr. Sumner, 'a great many.' A light glittered in his eyes. 'I heard of such a place only yesterday.'

'Where?'

'On Broadway. It happened like this. Two young men were coming out of a restaurant. They were about to jump into a taxi when a coloured boy accosted them. He asked them if they had any desire to go to a place where they could find drink and women.'

'And had they?' I interrupted.

'For the sake of the experience, yes. They went with the coloured boy, and eventually arrived at a quiet-looking house, somewhere in the fifties. On entering the house they were shown into a room containing some twelve or fifteen women.

This was thrilling. I said, 'What were the women doing?'

'They were drinking,' said Mr. Sumner.

'What else?'

Mr. Sumner looked at me somewhat impatiently. 'It was not so much what they were doing there. The point was that they were obviously women of a certain type, who would be willing to go home with any man who would pay them to do so.'

Irreverently, I thought of certain highly respectable parties I had attended, in Europe and in America, where the highly respectable guests were also women of a certain type, the only difference being that their fees were about a thousand per cent. higher. However, one could not tell that to Mr. Sumner.

'Was there any actual immorality?'

'Oh, no!'

'Then how did they know what sort of women they were?'

'By the conversation of the women themselves.'

'What is going to be done about it?'

'We shall obtain an order against the place, on the grounds that it is a public nuisance.'

'It doesn't sound so awfully public,' I muttered.

'What?' said Mr. Sumner, sharply.

I said nothing. There was nothing to say. The whole thing was ridiculous. It must be evident to any person of adult intelligence that no amount of legislation is going to dam up the sexual desires of men. In these circumstances, as long as society forces men to be monogamous, 'vice' will continue. The only choice which society possesses in the matter is whether it has its vice on the streets or whether it forces it indoors. There is no alternative. New York, by drastic efforts of the police, has driven its prostitutes off the streets. Personally, I regret this. I know that prostitutes have existed from the earliest ages, and will continue to exist till the earth is shrivelled and dead. In these circumstances, it seems to me better that they should parade the streets. For one thing, they get more fresh air, for another they are a decorative note of colour in a city's life. And most important of all, they are a constant reminder, to the flag-wagging fraternity, that their city is no better than anybody else's.

Since New York has driven them off the streets, they had to go indoors. And now that they *have* gone

indoors, it seems to me both cruel and foolish to follow them there.

The conversation had not got us very far, so I rose to my feet. As I turned to find my hat I noticed a long row of packing-cases stacked against the wall. I pointed to them.

'Is there anything amusing in these?' I asked. And instantly I could have bitten off my own tongue. 'Amusing!' Ye gods! Fortunately Mr. Sumner did not seem to notice the flippant adjective. I quickly repeated the question. 'Is there anything – er – objectionable in these packing-cases?'

'Yes. Pseudo-scientific trash. Obviously written with a desire to appeal to the low-minded.'

I cast a wistful eye at the packing-cases. At that moment I, too, felt exceedingly low-minded. It seemed to me a shame that Mr. Sumner should have all those packing-cases to himself.

I put my hand tentatively on one of the packing-cases. 'What are you going to do with them?' I asked. (You see, it was December 14th, and I was worrying about Christmas presents for my low-minded friends.)

'Burn them.'

'Where?'

Mr. Sumner's lips curled. 'The Post Office has an incinerator.'

They were the last words I heard him say, for at that moment the telephone rang. I gathered from the conversation that somebody was being vicious somewhere, so Mr. Sumner had to go and see about it.

I left him, feeling him to be so extremely sincere (though misguided) that I would not write about him. However, a few days later I learnt that he had apparently lent his support to a practice as unpleasant as any of the things he suppresses: i.e., the dispatch of decoys to the parks and subways, charged with instructions to encourage others to accost them. The fact that the decoys are usually accompanied by police officers seems to me a reflection on the police force rather than an exculpation of the Society. We occasionally adopt the same revolting procedure in England and as long as I can hold a pen I shall continue to protest against it.

It is for the above reason alone that I present the discreet and genial figure of Mr. Sumner in this light.

And now let us turn from the contemplation of Mr. Sumner to the contemplation of certain institutions which appear to have escaped his notice.

CHAPTER NINE

Nigger Heaven

At the table next to me sat six boys dressed as girls. Four were white and two were coloured. One was powdering his nose, another was rouging his lips, a third was sipping gin in a lady-like manner, a fourth was casting languorous glances in my direction. The two coloured boys, charmingly gowned in pale green, were so drunk that they had forgotten any of the conventions which apply to either sex.

As soon as you read these words you will, of course, hiss to yourself 'Berlin!' Only Huns go in for 'that' sort of thing! As all really nice people know, Germany is riddled, throttled, and overrun with every sort of perversion. Germany and nowhere else.

I greatly regret it, but the scene is not laid in Berlin. It is laid in Harlem, half an hour by taxi from the Ritz Hotel, New York. Nor am I writing of some exceptional orgy in a secret cellar known only to the underworld; I am writing of a place which opens candid doors on to Seventh Avenue, a place where everybody can walk in, without even the preliminary formalities of the ordinary speakeasy. A place which I entered quite by chance.

But let us return to our boys – or our girls. Nobody is paying any particular attention to them, because there are many similar anomalies scattered round the room. Yet I must pay attention to them, if only to admire the thoroughness with which they are playing their rôles. Nearest me is a blonde in blue velvet, fingering his (or her) pearls and glancing

somewhat acidly at his (or her) neighbour, who has gone one better than him (or her) in the matter of figure. This one is in black lace, cut very low at the back, and as he (or she) crosses his (or her) legs, one has a glimpse of a slender ankle and a diamond buckle, which is evidently coveted by the next anomaly, for he (or she) grabs at it with an almost masculine gesture.

However, such lapses from the ladylike are not tolerated in this sisterhood, and a sharp slap reminds him (or her) of his (or her) indiscretion. So he (or she) turns away, disgruntled, and as he (or she) does so I catch a glimpse of his (or her) neighbour. For this one I feel a certain pity. His (or her) frock is not so obviously Chanel as the others. It is rather shabby and old-fashioned, and the cloak which is drawn round his (or her) shoulders looks as if it had been manufactured out of an old red blanket.

The automatic piano begins to play, and in a moment the dance-floor is crowded. But not too crowded for an immense coloured man, with the glitter of gold in his teeth, to push across the room, advance to the table of the Persons (it seems the only word which will fit them), and ask the prettiest of them to dance. The person blushes, rises to its feet, and puts a white, timid hand on to the massive shoulder. And in a moment they are whirling round the room together, locked close, dancing with a natural grace which a great many professionals might envy.

I feel like saying to my companion, 'This is the weirdest thing I have ever seen,' but I restrain my-

self, for such an observation would stamp one instantly as a provincial. Nobody else seems to see anything particularly remarkable in it. Over in the corner, next to a 'lady' who looks like a policeman gone astray, sits one of New York's most popular actresses, whose private life is a model of discretion. Close by her is one of the season's debutantes, looking almost bored by the propriety of the proceedings. Why, then, should it shock me?

It shocked me for one reason only, to which I shall refer later. The fact that I was surrounded by men dressed as women seemed to me a matter which concerned those men alone. If I didn't happen to like it, I could do the other thing, and go outside. If they wished to dress up in this manner, I fail to see any reason why they should be prevented from doing so, any more than I should be prevented from parading Fifth Avenue in the costume of Queen Elizabeth, if the mood so seized me. Indeed, life would obviously be considerably more entertaining were the practice extended. The dullest speech of the dullest Senator would gain a certain piquancy if the orator were clothed in a short satin frock, and emphasized his points by waggling his pearls in the Speaker's face.

Nor was I disturbed from any moral indignation. In this year of 1928 it should be evident even to the most clouded mentalities that there are as many grades of sex as there are grades of intellect, and that pity, rather than blame, is the only punitive attitude which a civilized community can decently adopt towards persons such as I saw that night.

No – I was not shocked for any reasons so puerile.

I was shocked for one reason only – the sudden revelation of the hypocrisy, not only of New York, but of most of the English-speaking people. I had a vision of the white, narrow face of a Canadian woman whom I had once met, in my newspaper days, in London. She had come over to study the morality of our city, and as I interviewed her, she strode up and down the sitting-room of her hotel, inveighing against the terrible condition of our streets at night. 'I stood in Piccadilly Circus for two hours, and I saw passing by me a perpetual procession of prostitutes.' There was something terrible about the grim, set face. 'In Canada,' she said, 'we would not tolerate such things. We have cleared the women off the streets. It is now possible for a decent man to walk down the street at night without experiencing the least annoyance.'

Yeah?

I thought again of an American Methodist minister to whom I happened to remark that I thought of living in Paris, because it was the only place to work. He had delivered an old-fashioned tirade against the wickedest of cities. (Paris, incidentally, being one of the few citadels of family life still standing.) 'Live in a clean city,' he said, 'and your work will be clean. Live, if you must live in a city, in New York. It is noisy and hard and grasping, but at least, in sexual things, it is clean, as cities go.' Now that man was either a hypocrite or a fool. If he knew what I knew, he had no right to say that New York was any more 'moral' than London or Paris or Berlin. If he did *not* know what I knew, it was time

that he opened his eyes to what was going on all around him.

I apologize for introducing this dissertation. It interests me even less than it probably interests you. For after all, the only thing which I set out to do was to study the comedy of life. The only time when I shall attempt to judge the comedians will be when I am called to serve upon a jury in a court of law.

Certainly, in Harlem, the paints are laid on with a lavish brush. Let us study the place where we left the young persons in their sisters' clothes, always remembering that it is typical of many similar places in the locality.

The room is thick with smoke, which drifts up to the shabby tented ceiling, and hangs there in an acrid cloud. From the ceiling hang faded festoons of crimson paper – giving that air of melancholy which always attaches to Christmas decorations that are kept hanging, forlorn, through the fogs of February, until they are torn down by the winds of March. Round the sides are placed tables covered with American cloth, fitted so closely together that one can only seat oneself with difficulty, and can hardly move an elbow without nudging one's neighbour.

The automatic piano plays incessantly. No sooner has it ground out one tune, than a dancer darts across and places a nickel in one of the slots. Then there is a groan, a cranking of machinery, and it blares out once more. And instantly there is a locking of arms, a swaying of hips, a jogging of feet, and the marionettes begin to revolve once more.

As far as colour is concerned, there seem to be

rather more whites than blacks. But the behaviour, and the costume of everybody, with the exception of a few onlookers like myself, is similar. The 'anomalies' are evident in the coloured race as much as in our own. Indeed, for a full minute I gaze fascinated at a huge coloured man, in a dress of bright yellow satin, clumsily powdering his nose from a vanity bag. The powder gives an effect incredibly grotesque – like salt scattered on a scuttle of coals. But it evidently has the desired effect, for in a moment he is whirling round the room in the grip of arms even more powerful than his own.

'*Shi-shi with an undercurrent of murder.*' That was how Carl Van Vechten described it to me once, and, in a way, he was right. And yet – who is to blame them? I look out at this seething, twisting crowd, the very sight of which would drive many of my intelligent friends into a frenzy of denunciation, and I see through their contortions, through their abnormalities, through their pitiable gaiety, and I see that they are all seeking the same thing which you or I are seeking, and that is happiness. And for them I have even more pity than for their soberer brothers and sisters. For they have been born into the world under a cloud. They have been given twisted weapons with which to fight their battles, and the song which is on their lips is a song which they must never sing – a song which they can only whisper, sadly and in secret – to those few who can catch its echo.

They are seeking happiness – grasping at it with feverish fingers – fingers white and brown and black

– there in the smoke, under the shabby, tented ceiling – listening for that echo through the din of the cheap piano – drinking to it in tainted liquor – pursuing it faster, faster, until their eyes are glassy and their hearts give way and they fall by the wayside, to be removed as so much garbage by the sanitary inspectors of the world.

I pray to God that some of them may find it before they die.

The clock must now be switched forward to the hour of three in the morning, the hour at which the gaiety of Harlem is at its height.

I set out through the streets, which are as bright as at noon. There is a whirl of movement on the pavements. As we walk down towards our next destination, six coloured lads clatter toward us, yelling with glee, dancing the Charleston with wild agility. There is a flash of teeth, a momentary scuffle, and they are gone. A little further on three drunken coloured men stagger out of a saloon, singing a negro spiritual –

'Oh bye and bye
Bye and bye,
Ah'm going to lay down (hic) ma heavy load!'

Even bad gin cannot rob those dark, drum-like voices of their magic quality.

We enter another of Harlem's favourite places of amusement. This place is a palace compared to the other. There must be a thousand people here, white

and coloured. In the centre of the ceiling an immense crystal chandelier whirls incessantly, sending a million sparks of green and blue and purple on to the faces of the crowd. The noise is deafening. Every other person is drunk.

I have a sudden feeling of revulsion – a feeling that there is going to be a battle of races – a feeling that if we have to make exhibitions of ourselves, it would be more decent to do it among our own kind. I want to get out, but it is too late. The cabaret has begun.

Eight almost naked coloured girls are standing round the room. From their immense and cherry-coloured mouths there echoes a shrill scream of discord. They are joined by eight coloured men, in red pants and straw hats. They rock about together in a blaze of light. It isn't very pretty, but it affects the crowd so much that they yell their approval, and some of the waiters rush madly into the show, until they are dragged off by other waiters (or, occasionally, by guests who seem to desire their company).

The dancing becomes general. I am getting rather drunk myself. It is the only thing to do. I look down at the table and see the sweep of orange and vermilion lights reflected in the ice-water. Pretty lights – pretty lights! I take up an olive and throw it at a lady on my left. She picks it off the floor and eats it gravely, not glancing at me. A coloured waiter is standing before me, grinning. Why is he grinning? Who cares? He is very clever with that silver tray. It whirls and whirls on the tips of his

fingers, and it never falls off. Crash! It has fallen off. Or was it the band?

The noise is more fearful every moment. The whole air is filled with bombs of sound. One can feel the notes hurtling towards one like bullets and exploding like shrapnel. Look out! That trumpet is dangerous. You'd better duck if you want to avoid being killed. A momentary lull. Then a trombone explodes, and a shower of heavy metal notes bursts among the crowd, agitating them to a frenzy. And always there is soft, snarling accompaniment of the drums. It is as though a tiger were hidden in those drums – a tiger that roared whenever the door of his prison was beaten – a tiger that never rested.

Another tune, and the whole room turns blue. Melancholy, soft but tense, has us in its grip. The music is muted, morbid, – the notes seem to fall in despair from the instruments and drift along the floor. A myriad couples roll as though in the throes of death. Tragic face to tragic face – lips hanging half open – despair in the eyes. This is the ultimate damnation of sex. They will never escape from this, I feel; they will go on rolling and rolling, rooted to the same spot, gazing into each other's eyes until they are filled with hate, yet never able to get away – rolling, always rolling, till the music has driven them mad. . . .

Out again. Five o'clock. The pavements are not nearly so crowded now. I pause in a side street. An old coloured man wanders towards me, very, very drunk, tapping the curb with his walking-stick. He was singing

'Bye and bye
Bye and bye
Ah'm going to lay down (hic) ma heavy load.'

As I looked into his eyes, I saw that he was blind. I helped him to cross the street. It was a perfect example of the blind leading the blind.

It was not till I had been to Harlem many times that I realized how fundamentally different it is from anything else in New York. There is nothing dramatic about one's entry into Harlem. There is no sudden change from white to black. There are no gloomy portals to be assaulted, no passwords to be uttered in dark dialects. And yet, after that three-mile drive from the city to its suburb, one suddenly realizes, with a start of alarm, that here is another world – a world in which one is a stranger.

One late afternoon, in November, I set out, as though I were laying a ghost, to diagnose that start of alarm. I felt that daylight would prove an explanation to the mystery. After all, my previous expeditions had always been by night. It had been merely a question of jumping into a taxi at one end of the city and jumping out again at the other. One could not possibly expect to make any detailed record of the transition by such methods. So I went on foot, and before the night had fallen.

Here I was, in the centre of Harlem. And again, in the still daylight, there was stealing over me the strange feeling – which I had regarded as a distilla-

tion of the darkness – of being in another world. It seemed that the windows were watching me, that the crimson sky-signs were blinking me away, that the wind was blowing me back – back where I belonged. The figures thronging down the sidewalks seemed to be looming up in menace, closing in around me, driving me off. I held my breath, waiting for the onslaught. Then they dissolved, and passed me by.

It was half-past five. Already the shop-windows were beginning to blaze with light. I must hurry, if I was to see anything at all. I began to walk down Seventh Avenue.

The crowds still seemed to be charging towards me, but I shook off that feeling as ridiculous. After all there were just as many white people as coloured. And the coloured people looked far more amiable than the others. I liked the big-shouldered men, with their waisted overcoats and their derby hats and their bright yellow boots. I liked the flash, flash of white teeth, the lazy bass rumbles of talk that drifted past. 'Since then I've had much misery . . .' I heard the exquisite phrase, and glanced at the man who made it. He was standing at the corner of the street, talking to a girl who was almost white, with a pale face and blonde hair. Only her legs betrayed her. The couple suddenly turned, catching my eye. Shamefaced, I hurried on.

Was the secret to be found in the external scene – in the normal properties of daily life? I asked myself that question, but there seemed little which one could not match in any of the poorer streets of New York. The pavements were filthy, of course, – at times they

were almost snowed under with newspapers, carelessly discarded. When the wind blew, one had to close one's mouth if one did not wish to swallow some foul, flying pamphlet. But I had seen the pavements of Fifth Avenue almost as dirty as that.

Even those signs and portents, such as peanut machines, which seemed most fascinating to me, as an Englishman, were peculiar to America rather than to Harlem. Somebody should sing the praises of the peanut man – as romantic a figure as the lavender sellers of old Vauxhall. To me there is infinite comfort in the feathery clouds of steam that hover on the cold airs above the magic box, and a song of welcome in the high, piping note which it sings throughout the night.

Peanut machines, however, were no evidence of the *frisson* which had shaken me. Nor were the windows of the phrenologists, displaying vacant, staring heads, nor the cheap restaurants, which lured one with the promise of hot pigs' feet at fifteen cents per foot, nor the barbers' shops, with their whirring poles striped blue and red, and their dazzling white interiors where clients submitted to be shorn in a blaze of publicity, nor the pocket-billiard saloons, where sweating faces bent over spotted clothes. All these things could be matched in any Main Street.

I wandered into a theatre, and sat down. Although it was six o'clock, and the day was Sunday, the house was almost full. Looking back at the audience one saw a mass of black faces, made even darker by the occasional splash of alien white. I stared at those faces, and suddenly they seemed to surge towards me,

merging into one, nearer, nearer, more and more immense. I drew back instinctively, as one draws back at a movie show when a head on a screen swells to enormous proportions and seems to be about to swallow one up. A blink – and the illusion vanished. Somewhat shaken, I turned to resume my contemplation of the show.

Well – the mystery did not seem to solve itself here, either. A coloured comedian was singing a song that might well have been whistled in Piccadilly, forty years ago. . . .

'Lay low, Lizzie,
Lay low, Lizzie Brown . . .'

Red nose, old-fashioned gags, an ancient costume, stunts that had agitated the sides of our grandfathers – there was nothing remarkable here. Even when the chorus came on, it was much as other choruses. In this light, the girls looked almost white, and except that they seemed rather bored and lazy, they might have been any chorus in an English touring revue.

Then, a tornado of whistles. I looked round quickly. The noise was like a cyclone, shrill, earsplitting. Was it a riot? A war cry? But nobody else was looking round. The whistling was confined to the gallery and died away as quickly as it had come. The stalls were applauding politely. I got up, and went out again into the street.

I do not know where I walked. I was too irritated. Here was I, experiencing all sorts of disturbing sensations, for which there was no logical explanation. I

felt as though I were wandering about in Thibet, in danger of my life, and I wanted to know why. I stopped still and found that I had come much farther than I expected. The street was almost entirely dark. From the lamp-post nearby there came a thin circle of light which shone on to a pavement indescribably filthy. In the gloom some ash-bins were just discernible. An unpleasant odour drifted from them.

I looked up to find my direction. As I did so, a window on the opposite side of the street was opened, and a coloured man leant out with his arms on the ledge, watching me. I stood quite still. It seemed impossible to move. The street was narrow, and I could see the lamplight reflected in his eyes, could see his shirt move with his regular breathing. Still I stood there, and the whole city was forgotten. And then, far away, as though at the end of a distant corridor, a tram crashed past, and the spell was broken. I turned, and ran down the street, towards the light. I felt that I had discovered the secret of Harlem. But I should prefer not to tell you what it was.

CHAPTER TEN

Murder

I AM anxious to return, as soon as possible, to the pretty side of things, but it is impossible to do so without breaking rather violently the slender chronological thread which binds these glittering pages together. We are still in the month of November, and it was then that I first gazed upon the face of the murderer Remus. Nor can I continue until that face has been exorcised from my mind.

It is a pity, for it was a marvellous autumn, and it would be pleasant to linger for a little in the woods, while the wind sweeps around us with a riot of scarlet leaves and the whole sky is crazy with falling gold. Three autumns have I spent in America, during the last ten years, and each one has seemed more lovely than the last.

In the American fall there is nothing of the slow, sad transition from green to brown which comes with such mournful dignity to the autumn fields of England. There are none of those mists which hide, as though in mercy, the sable shabbiness of elms which were once so richly clad, nor those gentle rains which patter sorrowfully over deserted thickets, nor the cry of a homing bird, ever more distant and more distant, until it is gone, over the hill for ever.

No, – in America – Nature gives a party, as befits a younger country. 'If it is the end,' say the trees, 'let us celebrate it, for to-morrow we die.' And so, over-night, the whole of the Northern Continent is transformed. The maples become torches of flaming

gold, the dog-wood takes on a hectic flush, the mosses sparkle brilliantly in the shadow. And the winds come, and sing among the welcoming forests, and for a few days, there is a confetti carnival beneath a blazing, ecstatic sky. Then, suddenly, the winds die down, the trees realize that they are naked and are ashamed. Winter is here.

Among such sights as these, let us admit, it might be pleasant to linger, but we should not be true to American life if we did so. One cannot linger in America – that is one of the few reasonable criticisms which one can make against that continent. One must go on – till one can go on no longer. And, for the moment, our goal is the trial of a murderer.

The trial of Remus was being held in Cincinnati. I have been told that this is the town in which Sinclair Lewis resided when he was gathering material for his brilliantly horrible satire on the American business man – Babbit. If that is so I should like to know where he found his Babbits. I met a great many business men there, but they seemed more anxious to talk about modern English poetry than about business, and when they did talk about business they confined themselves to problems of international finance, which they discussed with vision and generosity. I never heard one of them refer to his ice-box, nor to his car, nor to his radio, nor to the stock-market, nor even to 'the tallest building in the city.' Nor did they talk in loud voices, nor get drunk. I have a particular affection

for Cincinnati. I should like to call it an 'ugly city with a great soul,' were not that phrase unpleasantly reminiscent of the style of the late Ella Wheeler Wilcox. It is, however, in spite of its grimy energy, a city of deep and genuine culture. And I could show Mr. Lewis a great many more Babbits in the venerable cities of Oxford and Cambridge than he would ever find in Cincinnati.

On the day before I attended the trial I ate my Thanksgiving dinner at the lovely old colonial home of Mr. W. T. Howe, some twenty miles from the city. I have memories of white walls, and mellow early American furniture, and the light shining through cases of early American glass – amethyst and saffron and indigo – and I have memories, too, of pumpkin pie, and turkey, and cranberry sauce, and an old Chartreuse which was bottled in New Orleans many years ago – a Chartreuse which was the colour of Emeralds, and caused the heart to rejoice so much that I remember running down the road backwards, that afternoon, explaining airily to my host that in this manner one got more exercise.

On the following day I went to the Remus trial. And here these agreeable meanderings must stop. For I can find nothing pleasant to say either about its actors or the manner in which it was acted.

For the benefit of those to whom the name Remus carries with it only the historical association of Romulus, it should be mentioned that George Remus was a bootlegger who had murdered his wife. He did not deny that he was a bootlegger. He did not deny that he murdered his wife. In fact, there was very

little that he denied except that there was any reason for him to die.

The trial had been going on for months, and it was now reaching its climax. As we entered the immense building in which the court of justice was situated, newspaper boys flocked round us bearing the latest editions in green and pink, yelling out the last-minute details. Interest was at fever pitch. The elevators were jammed, the corridors were densely crowded, and as we went into the court I felt that it would be impossible to breathe, so thick and tense was the atmosphere.

I was allowed to stand within a few yards of the Judge. For a few moments I was too occupied in preventing my ribs from being broken to pay much attention to the scene which stretched before me. But when I had eventually established a position I looked round. That one look told me all I needed to know.

Was I in a court of law? Was a man being tried for his life? Was the whole majesty of American justice involved? I suppose so. It was a little difficult to believe. Stretching back to the farthest wall, filling most of the court to suffocation, I saw a crowd of young men and women, lounging about in careless attitudes, chewing gum, eating candy, ogling each other, grimacing at their friends, burying their heads in their hands, overcome by sudden paroxysms of laughter.

The shock of this sight was so great that I had no time to be disgusted. I followed the direction of their eyes to find out what was amusing them. I saw



a girl in black, seated on a chair in front of the Judge. A man was holding something in front of her – a piece of a woman's clothing. Dull stains were on it.

'Was your mother wearing this on the day she was shot?'

'Yes, sir.'

'You are certain of that?'

'Yes, sir.'

The voice was so faint that one could hardly hear it.

I looked again at the crowd. They still retained their air of gaiety. I saw only one face which seemed to reflect the tragedy which was being enacted before them. It was the face of a little boy of seven. He had paused in the middle of eating a piece of candy. His eyes were filled with tears.

A few feet away from the girl in black there sat a man surrounded by papers. Remus himself. He was leaning back in his chair, his legs crossed, his short fat fingers drumming on the table in front of him. There was a film of sweat over his coarse and drooping cheeks, but it was not caused by fear. There was a sneer on his lips and a light of contempt in his eyes. He was chewing gum.

That was the most grotesque touch of all. The murderer was chewing gum. Or, if it was not gum, it was a lozenge or a piece of toffee. The fact remained that he chewed. The square, gross jaw was jerking away with the mechanical rhythm of a Robot. It did not matter that the air was thick with tragedy. He chewed. It was of no consequence that the whole court resounded with the distracted beating of the

wings of the Angel of Death, the angel of *his* death. He chewed. And not only he, but his prosecutors. After all, why should they not do so? They were absolutely in tune with the whole tone of the trial, and of those who were conducting it.

This was a nightmare. Closing my eyes for an instant I had a vision of a vast jury standing on an immense stage. They were rocking to and fro in a sort of dance, and each time that they moved, their jaws moved in rhythm. They were pointing their fingers at me, and crying 'You shall die, you shall die! You shall die in the most efficient, steam-heated, electrical manner. You shall die to the sound of a jazz-band, and your last words will be syndicated in forty thousand papers, and your death rattle will be broadcast to a million listeners. You shall die, a l'Americain, you shall die . . . but not too soon!'

I open my eyes again. I have a feeling that I am in an auction room, where vice is set in the scale against trickery, and murder is bartered for intrigue. There is not one solitary saving grace of dignified custom to soften the naked brutality of the facts. There are no scarlet robes – there are no sonorous phrases – everything is nude and bestial.

See the leading attorney for the defence as he strolls over to cross-examine the chief witness. He is clad in ugly, Middle-Western clothes. His hands are in his pockets. He speaks in a drawling, acutely nasal voice. There is something terrifying in his utter normality. He is a man whom you may meet in a hundred Pullman cars, a man whom you may jostle in the subway, the man who stands next to

you in the drug-store while you buy your cigarettes. He is not, as is an English barrister, an abstract personification of the law. He is an ordinary human being. And as such he tends to intensify the sense of the prisoner's captivity; he makes one realize, in all its poignancy, the agony which even a brute must feel when it looks out through the bars which hold it fast.

Never did I so passionately desire to recall the pomp and ceremony of the Old World as when I stood in that Court of Law. Till now, I had been inclined to regard our ancient trappings as somewhat ridiculous, however they might be expressed. I found no more excitement in the scarlet robes of the Recorder than in the rattling, golden coach of the Lord Mayor.

But now – I longed for all the robes in the world to cover the nakedness of the accusers and the accused, for all the venerable and sonorous phrases in the world to soften the hideousness of the accusation, for all the darkness of a dying city to cover the hateful thing which was being exposed to the light.

Oscar Wilde once said that he could bear any tragedy that should come to him clothed in purple, to the sound of mourning – any tragedy in which he might face death with a gesture that should not be mean. He expressed a universal desire of mankind, a desire which has found many strange echoes from the cry 'Let me like a soldier fall' to the thin, plaintive sigh of the æsthete who longed to pass away 'in an alcove, to the sound of flutes.' Life is a bitter thing – it has so little sweetness – may not its end,

at least, have dignity? Plaintively, absurdly – if you like – we pray to our Heavenly Father to grant us this last desire. We would pass out like gentlemen, even if we have lived our lives as cads. We would not stumble at the exit, even if our entrance had been pitiable. It is the one proof, in a distracted world, of the ultimate dignity of Man.

And here – in Cincinnati – how was that motive served? By a bright, airy court, hideously decorated, resonant with the roar of trams from outside. By a vulgar crowd, sweating in the steam heat, laughing and chewing gum. By drawling, nasal voices, discussing passion as though it were a commodity, lust as though it were something one bought by the pound, fear as though one could handle it over a counter. I hold no brief for Remus. I think him a figure of menace and of danger. But in this atmosphere of organized horror I would gladly have fought to give him freedom.

Years ago, when I was a young reporter, it was among my painful duties to attend the trial of a murderess at the Old Bailey in London. I sat in that court for many days, trembling with agony and with disgust. As far as I remember, they did not publish my criticisms, because all that I could see was the torture in the eyes of the two lovers, the agony, exquisitely prolonged for the delectation of the English public, of two souls who had committed the supreme crime of trying to be happy together, and in order to attain that vile condition, had presumed to remove the obstacle which an all-wise Creator had placed in their way.

CHAPTER TEN

During that trial, the thing which had most revolted me was the callous business-like air with which it had all been conducted. I felt like getting up on my seat and crying to the Judge 'For God's sake, let us at least admit that this thing is a tragedy. Let us at least bow our heads. Let us at least speak softly.' I wanted to send away the chattering crowds; above all, I wanted, in common decency, to turn down the lights.

Little could I have guessed, at the time, that this trial was a miracle of dignity and restraint compared with a trial in an American court of law. I say 'a' trial, rather than this particular trial, because I was to learn, as my experience broadened, that the Remus trial was no exception to the general sordid rule. There was always the same grinning, chewing crowd, always the same auction-room atmosphere – and always the incredible vulgarity of the publicity.

It is so utterly unworthy of America. I am not suggesting that anybody should adopt the English procedure, although my personal conviction is that the more formal you make a trial, and the more you remove it from the realm of real life, the more you moderate the sufferings of the accused. You may say that you do not wish to moderate the sufferings of the accused. But the Americans are a kindly people, and I should have thought that as long as justice was done, they would have wished it to be done with decency and restraint. I am completely unable to understand how a great nation can countenance the grotesque orgies which are carried on in the name of the law – how they can allow, not

only the vulgarity of the procedure but the ugliness of the publicity – how they can allow photographers to poke their cameras behind prison bars, to pull out hysterical wives of criminals from the slums, force them on their knees, and photograph them as they pray for the lives of their husbands. I cannot even understand why a nation which prides itself upon its capacity for speed, its unrivalled hustle, should permit these trials to drag on and on until the whole country is nauseated with some foul personality, until even the small boys in the street have learned to call some worthless murderer by his first name, and to discuss with intimate relish the more revolting aspects of his pitiful life.

I am becoming slightly incoherent. I am also emphasizing the very element in American life which I always try to forget. Let us, therefore, terminate this sermon abruptly.

Remus, by the way, was acquitted. So far, I understand, he has refused all of the numerous offers of marriage which came to him from the hard-boiled virgins to whom his trial had afforded so agreeable a thrill.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A Wizard of Washington

EARLY in December – I think it was then – I shook myself free of the spell of the underworld and decided that it was time for me to inform President Coolidge of my presence in his country. I therefore took the train to Washington.

Arrived in Washington, I leapt into a taxi, and promptly remembered that I had no comb. Obviously, one could not see President Coolidge without combing one's hair. I therefore tapped on the window and told the man to stop at a drug-store. It may seem odd to buy a comb in a drug-store, but one buys everything in drug-stores.

In the drug-store, I approached a charming lady dressed in white.

'May I have a comb?' I said.

'A what?'

'A comb.'

She pursed her lips primly as though she were not used to hearing such words. And, indeed, she was not, for she said, 'Never heard of it.'

I laughed artificially. This was evidently some game which one was expected to play. And then, I too smiled primly. After all, was I not the customer?

'A comb,' I repeated. 'A quite ordinary one.'

At that, she began to become incensed. 'I tell you,' she repeated so loudly that I jumped, 'I never heard of it.'

This was baffling. I looked at her. She was not bald. Nor was there a light of mania in her eye.

Nor had she the air of one who had led a strictly cloistered life. She looked a quite normal being, who moved in a world of drugs and movies and candy and . . . combs. I did not know what to do. I tried once again.

'A comb,' I repeated weakly. 'C-O-M-B. For the hair, you know. H-A-I-R.'

A look of radiant understanding passed over her features.

'Oh,' she said, 'you want a *comb*?'

I suggested that this was the idea. I asked her:

'What did you *think* I said?'

'Gard knows!' she crooned.

And to this day the thing is a mystery to me, because how one can pronounce 'comb' in any other way than I pronounce it, I do not know.

Armed with the comb, which was bright green, and smelt of sulphur, I arrived at my destination. I was staying with one of the most attractive women in Washington – a graceful, supremely intelligent being – who had been for some years one of the leading political hostesses. However, she was a Democrat – one of the purest Democrats I have ever known – and even if I had wished to ask her to help me to see Coolidge – (which I did not) – I am quite certain that she would have refused. With the Republicans she would have no dealings, and she did not care who knew it.

I therefore rang up the British Embassy, had a few moments' conversation, and went out for a walk.

It was an exquisite afternoon. Whenever I have been to Washington, I have noticed, in the air, a

smell of burning wood. This smell, blended with the tang of a still, frosty day, is quite intoxicating. I wanted to sing with joy. After all, life was very amusing. Here I was in America, master of my fate for the first time in life, able to travel when and where I wanted. Besides, I was going to see Coolidge.

At that, I stopped short. *Was* I going to see Coolidge? It suddenly occurred to me that perhaps I was not. Why, after all, should I see Coolidge? Distinguished foreign author? Well . . . Foreign, certainly. Author, without a doubt. But . . . however I will not parade my modesty before you. Yet it occurred to me, even if I were a distinguished foreign author, I had no particular reason for seeing Coolidge. I could not walk into the White House and say 'Mr. Coolidge, I've come to see you.' He would be perfectly justified in asking why, and I could not possibly think of an answer. The more I considered it, the more complicated did the whole affair appear. And so, I decided to put it from my mind. For the Lincoln memorial had suddenly swung into view and even if I could not see Coolidge, I could, at least, see Lincoln.

I walked up the steps. Although it was only five o'clock, there was nobody about. From the city came the same faint smell of burning wood. The sun was sinking slowly. It was very cold.

Lincoln looked out on to a frozen world. Stern and white, he sat, on his marble dais, and through the tall pillars of his temple the late sunlight lay on the pavements in pools of icy silver.

As I stepped out of the shadows, and walked

closer to the walls where his words are carved for ever, my footsteps echoed loudly through the temple, accentuating its emptiness. I wondered why so few people came here. It is one of the most lovely memorials in the world. Yet on each occasion that I visited it, I was the sole occupant. Lincoln must have come to know me quite well. I glanced at him, rather shyly, but he was still staring into space – out through the pillars on to the white city that he had saved.

There they were, on the walls, those words which no repetition can mar, which must purge the foulest lips that uttered them, carved as they should be carved, simply, and in shadow, on white marble walls. I took off my hat, and read them.

'I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the republic they died to save. I pray that our Heavenly Father. . . .'

I put on my hat and walked towards the light. So I paused on the steps, and with one blink, I saw clearly again, and Washington was stretched before me.

I caught my breath at its beauty. It was five o'clock, and the sky was the colour of primroses. The long straight waterway that stretches to the Capitol was frozen fast, and its surface was dotted with hundreds of skaters. From this distance they looked like a Monet picture come to life – specks of crimson and blue and black, circling in a fascinating

kaleidoscope, monotonous, soundless, intensely alive. I stared at them, hypnotized. They were so perfectly poised in the picture. The modern buildings in the distance, dappled with mauve (for the sky was absurdly changeable), the grey steel river on the right, the noble flight of steps beneath, and far away, the dome of the Capitol, a white bubble that might drift, at any moment, to join the early stars.

I stood, and I stood, and I stood. And I caught a cold. But I did not mind, for the sky was like a fickle woman, changing her ribbons to greet some awaited lover. First there would be a flutter of blue, and then a band of red. For one supreme moment every colour was discarded for a robe of gold, which set fire to the entire city. And then the sky relented, the golden robe was tossed over the hills, and there came a soft, blue grey, in whose folds the stars glittered like ancient diamonds.

A last look at Lincoln. One had a feeling that perhaps he had risen from his marble chair, weary of repose, and had stalked out, a white, lanky ghost, over the hills. But no. He was still there. And the lights of Washington found no reflection in his face.

I walked away in a trance. When I arrived at home, they told me that I was to see President Coolidge on the following morning. But I paid no heed. For I felt that I had just seen Lincoln himself, and through his eyes, his city.

The story opens with a squeak.

It should, I know, open with a rattle of drums and

a caw of eagles. (I use the word 'caw,' having already crossed out 'screech,' 'clamour,' and 'whirr.' I do not know what eagles do for you, but for me they caw, in a high, arrogant tone.)

Yes – there should be drums and eagles, and an immense star-spangled banner, stirring majestically in a Washington breeze. And in the foreground I should place the massive figure of America's President, silent like the sphinx and wise as Job.

All the same, the story opens with a squeak. I can make it open in no other way. For that, at first, was the thing which most impressed me.

I am sitting in a dazzling glare of sunlight. Opposite, mercifully shaded, is the silent President. There is a hush in the room, though, from outside, one can hear the echo of many sounds – the hum of motors through bright, glittering streets, the barking of a dog with which a policeman is dallying in the White House Gardens, the shuffle of footsteps in many neighbouring corridors.

A hush in the room and then – once more – that nerve-racking squeak. It penetrated my consciousness so acutely that I can even set it down in terms of music.

Now, I am going into details about this matter because I wish you to realize the precise conditions under which my reception by the first gentleman of America took place. It took place on a chair which refused to be muted. It was a chair which insisted on joining in every argument, which punctuated every witticism, and which uttered a final screech of derision when I rose to say good-bye. It was a chair

which was calculated to induce an inferiority complex in even the most brazen hundred per cent. American. And I firmly believe that it was a chair which President Coolidge regards with the warmest affection, as one of his most staunch allies. For nobody could get the better of him on a chair like that.

Let me tell you a story. You may regard it as a diversion, but I do not think it entirely irrelevant. Not long ago a friend of mine was summoned before Mussolini. (Things like that are mere bagatelles in the lives of my friends.) He had been told of the miles of marble pavement which it would be necessary for him to traverse, under the eye of the Duce. He had been warned of the hypnotic eye, the awesome silence, broken only by the clattering of his own heels. Therefore he shod himself in rubber, and entered the presence as stealthily as any panther. The effect upon Mussolini exceeded all his expectations. He was so impressed by this silent visitor that his arms unfolded, his steely eye was imbued with common curiosity, and he rose slowly from his seat, glaring with an irresistible fascination at the extremities of my friend, who was drifting calmly towards him.

The obvious deduction is that I should have equipped myself with an air-cushion before visiting the White House. However, I had heard nothing of this Presidential ruse. And even now, I ask myself if it was indeed a ruse. For Calvin Coolidge is not the sort of man who would deliberately make a chair squeak, although, being possessed of a dry humour,

he would enjoy to the full the results of its squeaking.

It is to be assumed that the President enjoys the kingly prerogative of immunity from quotation during private interviews. It is also to be assumed that this immunity applies only to his utterances on political questions or on domestic matters which it would be impertinent for a stranger to discuss.

'Very well,' you may say, 'having admitted those two restrictions, you deny yourself any power of quotation whatever, for the simple reason that President Coolidge has never been known to discuss any but political questions. Literature, the arts, even a discreet recognition of the soul of man, have never gained any spoken tributes from him.'

Is that so? During the first five minutes, I must admit, it seemed only too true. The silent President played up to his rôle to perfection. He asked me why I was in America. Feeling rather faint, I replied that I had come over to lecture, and supervise the production of a play. To which President Coolidge replied, in firm, round tones:

'Oh!'

There was an interval of about a minute's silence, broken only by the screech of the chair. Then, still more faintly, I said:

'The last time I was here was in President Wilson's day.'

President Coolidge replied, in firm, round tones, 'Oh!'

With ghastly brightness, I ventured the deep, philosophical observation that the world did not

seem to have altered so very much in the interval between my two visits.

President Coolidge replied, in firm, round tones, 'Oh!'

At that moment, something in me began to stir. Were we two idiots, that we should waste each other's time in this manner – I muttering inanities and he saying 'Oh!'? – If I had something to tell him, then, let me tell it, or be gone. Whether it was the etiquette to take the conversation into my own control or not I did not care. I had something to tell him. It was about the young men of England.

I deliberately painted the picture black, partly because it is my honest conviction that Europe bears on its face the stamp of decay, economic and political, and partly because I wanted to see how Coolidge would respond to so extreme a statement. He responded exactly as I had expected, with wary generalizations. There were phrases about 'painful recovery,' references to 'economic adjustment,' a tactful comment on the 'growth of a peace spirit.'

And now at last I can come to the point. I was growing tired of beating about the bush. I said:

'I think it must be a little hard for most Americans, not excepting you yourself, to realize quite the extent to which the younger generation in Europe are still overshadowed by the possibility of future wars. It hangs over them like an immense cloud. It's no use to deny the existence of that cloud. If you take a map of Europe and put your finger on it at random, you would find a dozen reasons for war at any spot where your finger rested. As a result, many of the

younger men are filled with a feeling of utter futility. They feel that they are under sentence of death, and that creative effort, in those circumstances, is worthless. I myself think this attitude is utterly wrong – criminal almost. But you can trace the symptoms in every phase of European art – in the long silence of our best poets, like Siegfried Sassoon, in the neurotic, distracted plays of Noel Coward, in numberless artists, in the whole social life of the community itself. If people only understood that, they would also understand our "decadent" young men and their "distorted" point of view. But they never *will* understand . . .'

Abruptly, I stopped. There was silence. I felt acutely self-conscious. Had I disgraced myself? Had I taken unpardonable liberties? Slowly I raised my head. I looked into as kind a pair of eyes as I ever saw.

It was then that the miracle took place. For Coolidge – the 'silent' President, the man who 'never looked at a picture,' the man who 'could not be bothered with writers,' the 'arch-Philistine,' the 'hard-boiled politician,' said to me:

'I think I understand, more clearly than you imagine, what you mean.'

I thanked him. That, at least, was something.

He leant forward, and continued:

'Not long ago, I happened to visit an exhibition of modern pictures. It was held at Pittsburg, and almost every European nation was represented – your own country, France, Germany, Italy – the whole lot of them. And as I looked at those pictures,

I felt that I could see through them, into the minds of the nations which had created them. I could see the torment out of which they had been born. If that nation's psychology was still diseased, so was its art. The traces of neurosis were unmistakable. If, on the other hand, the nation was on the road to recovery, if its people were rediscovering the happiness which they had lost, the story was told in the picture, too.'

He paused, and then added, so softly that I could only just hear him:

'The only respect in which I would differ from you is that I thought I observed as much evidence of recovery as of sickness.'

I was so astonished to hear these words coming from the lips of Calvin Coolidge that for a moment I thought I must be dreaming.

'Do you mean to say,' I asked, 'that you could trace the evidence of this unrest even in a *landscape*?'

'Yes,' said Coolidge, 'I think I do.'

Well – after that, anything else which I could say would be bathos. I felt much as Moses must have felt after he had struck water from the rock. More than that, I felt a sense of relief at the knowledge that here was a man, in the most powerful position in the world, who was far more alive than one had realized to the problems which were agitating me and my contemporaries. And so – let us leave that room, and that squeaking chair, and that quiet, courteous man who, for once in a way, had chosen to speak.

But do not, for a moment, let us leave Coolidge himself. There are one or two stories about him

which I must tell, even at the risk of instant deportation. Here is one of them – (exclusive).

A delegation of very important Jews from Palestine are waiting in the anteroom. The secretary opens the door and tells them that the President is ready to receive them. Gravely they file in. The President stands up. Without any warning the chief Rabbi (or whatever else he was) breaks into an impassioned speech in Hebrew.

The President listens to the speech with a face as impassive as that of any sphinx. When it is over he is about to speak, but the interpreter steps forward and translates it. When *he* has finished, the President again opens his mouth to say something; but he is too late, for the first speaker is off again, with still more Hebrew eloquence.

At last, he has finished for the second time. And before the interpreter can interrupt, President Coolidge gets his word in. He thanks the delegation very sincerely for the kind sentiments which they have expressed towards America. And then, with the mark of the sphinx still on his face, he adds: 'I think' – (pause) – 'the best thing I can wish to the Jews in Palestine' – (pause) – 'is that they will get on' – (pause) – 'as well as they get on' – (pause) – 'over here.'

And then he breaks into a broad grin, bids the flattered but mystified delegation good morning, and sits down to resume the work of the day.

That is story number one. There are two more. Here is the second.

One day, during his Governorship of Massachusetts, an old friend called on him.

'Well, Cal,' said the friend, 'how are things going?'

'Pretty well,' said Coolidge.

'What's the hardest part?' asked the friend.

'Dining out.'

'What – the speeches?'

'No – before and after.'

The friend looked puzzled. 'How's that?' he asked.

Coolidge looked at him impassively. 'It's like this,' he said, 'if I haven't got anything to say, I can't say it. *Can't!*'

And here is the final story. Not long ago a certain distinguished senator was being bitterly attacked in the Press. The hostility became so virulent that he was seriously perturbed and requested another senator to bring the matter to the attention of the President. This senator presented himself before Coolidge with a sheaf of Press extracts.

Coolidge began to read them. After two pages, he looked up. 'Is he worried by this?' he asked.

'Yes, Mr. President, he is, – very worried.'

The President read on. After another two pages he looked up again. 'Is this bothering him?' he asked.

'Why, yes, Mr. President. Supposing they said those things about you, wouldn't you be bothered?'

Coolidge pushed the papers away from him. 'I never read disagreeable things,' he said.

I only hope that if he ever notices these scattered words he may not put them in that category. For I liked Coolidge. He has a heart, which beats all the more warmly because he does not wear it on his sleeve.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Another Wizard

In a sunlit corridor that runs the length of a certain apartment in Massachusetts Avenue, Washington, there hangs a picture of a man with white hair and searching eyes. His face is in profile, and is tilted upwards, as though the sitter were searching for something that was almost lost to view. And in spite of the gay background of pastel blue, there is a quality about the picture which, though it is infinitely human, is also a little chilled and forlorn.

It was kind of Sir William Orpen, who painted this profile, to provide me with so succinct an analysis of Mr. Andrew Mellon. Before I met him I knew only the obvious things about him – that he was the third richest man in America, that he had factories for making every conceivable object, from plate glass to linseed oil, that he had broken the Standard Oil monopoly in Pennsylvania, that many people regarded him as the greatest Secretary of the Treasury since Hamilton. But these things are only the dust and ashes of personality. They do not help you to see the man as he is.

I shall always see him, in the light of a yellow cocktail, made from the good old rye whisky which in the old days he used to distil. Is it flippant to refer to that cocktail? I think not. Because, in its depths, there lurked the germ of an immense controversy in which he himself has been not mildly involved.

He referred to that controversy. 'You may not

like that cocktail. It's made of rye whisky. However, it is very mild.'

I assured him that I appreciated rye whisky.

'I have had it for many years,' he went on. And after a second's hesitancy: 'In the position which I occupy I have naturally to be circumspect. By a strange anomaly the enforcement of the Prohibition Law, instead of being under the Judiciary, is under my own Department, the Treasury.'

'Can't you shift it off on to somebody else?'

'I might like to,' he said, 'but it appears to be impractical.'

I learnt afterwards that his description of himself as 'circumspect' might better have been described as conscientious. For he is scrupulous that any wine which is drunk in his house should have been bottled before the golden days of the Volsted Act. With him, it is a matter of principle, and he is one of the few men I have ever met to whom principles are an iron law.

But again, I care not for principles. As soon as a biographer begins to talk about principles, you know that he is either a bore or has nothing to say. I prefer to draw pictures.

In another room in Massachusetts Avenue there hangs a Corot – one of the gayest Corots you have ever seen – a thing of singing branches and laughing leaves, painted with an almost rapturous rhythm, by a brush that must surely have trembled with delight. And one of the first things that Mellon said to me was:

'I love Corot, not only because he was a great

master of paint, but because he saw the happy side of nature, and he handed his vision on to us. There are enough sad things in the world to make his work particularly precious.'

Again the sense of something chilled and forlorn. 'So many sad things in the world.' One sees those things, then, even when one can throw millions out of the window? 'The happy side of nature.' So it was only through the eyes of an artist that one could visualize it?

In his method of buying pictures you may see the whole man. It is a method which combines just this mixture of taste and business, the enthusiasm of the connoisseur and the caution of the capitalist. Packing-cases are constantly arriving at the house in Massachusetts Avenue. But packing-cases are also constantly departing. For Mr. Mellon will not buy a picture until he is sure that he wants it, and before he can be sure of that he must have lived with the picture, sometimes for only a few weeks, sometimes for a whole year. And so, many Rembrandts and Romneys which have gained homes along the sunlit corridors have found that after all those homes were only temporary, and that they must return to the places from whence they departed.

For to Mellon, names mean little. 'He knows what he likes' – and that, after all, is the only possible basis for æsthetic judgment.

It was when we were talking of the economic situation in England that I suddenly realized of whom he so constantly reminded me. Whenever I have listened to Balfour I have marvelled not only

at the amazing lucidity of his venerable brain but also at the eagerness with which he listens to the arguments of younger men. Mellon had both that lucidity and that eagerness. For example:

He had been explaining to me the peculiarities of unemployment in America. He had pointed out that the comparatively negligible unemployment was due to no fundamental causes, as in England, but to a combination of economic and psychological accidents. He instanced the coal strike in Pennsylvania, and coloured his theme by telling me of the apparent antipathy which any coal miner feels for changing his job. As he spoke, although he used no sharp colours, no exaggerated words, I seemed to gain a very clear picture of the American coal miners.

'Such unemployment as there is could be very quickly absorbed.'

'I wish I could say the same about England,' I said.

'Isn't it getting better there?'

'I fail to see how it can ever get better.' And I told him why. Afterwards it struck me as faintly comic that I, who have great difficulty in adding up a laundry bill, and know less about finance than a rabbit, should be expounding to one of the greatest international financial experts the causes of a nation's industrial decline. But I also remembered, in retrospect, the quiet keenness with which he had listened to my probably puerile dissertation, how his eyes had never left my face, how he had nodded when I made a point with which he agreed, and how

he had held me up, merely by a passing shadow in his eyes, when I had assumed a point which he felt might be called in question. Cool, diffident, etched in white and black, he sat there. He was the master of incalculable millions. He could have bought whole countries, sent more than one pinchbeck crown spinning down the corridors of history, could have caused many deserts to blossom as the rose. Yet, here he was, utterly restrained, slightly fatigued, ascetic, lighting that sort of tiny cigar for which one pays a few cents at any drug-store, and listening to me, who has never done anything in life but enjoy it.

Why? Because, I think, he is a *grand monsieur*. I shall hardly be accused either of impertinence or even of originality when I observe that a great many American politicians are not *grands messieurs*, are not indeed *messieurs* at all, and would apparently, judging from their public utterances, be exceedingly indignant if anybody accused them of any such tendencies. But Mellon is of the most delicate fibre. Were I to choose for him the background which would most suitably express his personality, I should choose the library of an Elizabethan house in England. In the foreground would be a glass of port, and in the background the family Gainsborough, not entirely free from dust. Through the windows one would see a wide stretch of green park, dotted with formal oaks, and across the lawn one would observe the approaching figure of the estate bailiff, coming to render an account of his stewardship to his master, Sir Andrew Mellon, ninth baronet of his line.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Father of Lizzie

I HAD now gazed, for varying periods, and for no particular reason, upon the faces of President Coolidge, George Remus, Big Bill Thompson, Lindbergh, Gloria Swanson, Andrew Mellon, Anita Loos and the President of the Society for the Suppression of Vice. Having returned to New York, I sat down and proceeded to contemplate, in retrospect, this alluring gallery. It suddenly occurred to me that there was somebody missing. Who could it be? Ah, cries the bright little girl at the back of the hall – it is Henry Ford!

The bright little girl is quite right. It *was* Henry Ford. I suddenly remembered him in the middle of a very charming dinner party. And one moves so quickly in America that two hours had not passed before I had arranged myself, in a highly decorative position, in a train which was travelling with great speed to Detroit.

I had a theory that Detroit was only five hours from New York. With this theory, God, and the makers of maps, were at variance. I had also a theory that it lay to the south. I have looked it up in the map, and though it does not seem to be marked, I am convinced that it must lay to the north. For on the next morning we passed over apparently endless stretches of snow, and when at last we emerged at Detroit, some time in the afternoon, a bitter wind whistled through my light overcoat, chilling me to such an extent that I could gain no satisfaction from

the thought that it was a far more beautiful overcoat than any other in the train.

That same night, at half-past nine, still practising the American theory of hustle, I arrived at the Ford works to dance at Mr. Ford's party. Let us lean back and summon up the picture as clearly as we may.

The room was filled with the sweet and formal music of spinets and muted violins, and to the sound of that music we were all dancing quadrilles. In and out, round and about, in endless serpentine formations we pranced, and constantly our endeavours led to chaos so that we were forced to hurry back, a little breathless and confused, to our corners, where we waited till the end of the measure. And then, the thin, nasal voice of the dancing instructor would wail our orders. One order, in particular, I remember:

'Honour your corner lady –
Bow to your partners all.'

I had considerable difficulty in honouring my corner lady, for she had little sense of direction, and instead of standing square to the north, south, east or west, was usually to be found, in a giggling condition, facing some indeterminate point of the compass. So, at least, it seemed to me at the time, though, on reflection, it may have been my fault as much as hers. For I was not nearly so interested in my partner as in my host, who was leading the neighbouring quadrille.

How he was adoring it all! I was adoring it too.

He has permanently converted me to these entrancing measures. How gravely he bowed! How archly he pointed his foot! How agile were his knees, when he twirled round and round! How quickly he regained his position when the mellow, traditional music ceased, and what skilful pats he administered to those dancers who, in the unaccustomed intricacy of the dance, had momentarily lost their places! One had a feeling that this was the ideal recreation of the man who had mastered the machine, for in it, human beings circled with the pleasing regularity of cogwheels. It was as though some master hand were winding a handle behind the door, to whose rhythm we were all rotating, like puppets on a Swiss musical box.

It was a fascinating place for a party. We had motored out from Detroit at about nine o'clock, down a road so long and so straight that one had a feeling that its maker must have continued it out of sheer perversity. To the left of us, across the river, lay Canada, and the thought of it made me feel somehow homesick. In front, white lights stretched in one long chain to infinity. And to the left, almost as soon as we left Detroit, were the outposts of the Ford works – first a small factory, then a Ford airplane plant, with a distant searchlight stretching a pale, groping hand to the stars, and long sheds brilliantly illuminated with a ghastly, greenish glow.

The dance itself was held in the Ford Experimental Building. One entered an immense hall, so big that the end was lost to view. In this hall were multitudinous desks, covered with dust sheets, be-

neath which there protruded an occasional chart or blueprint. Down the side of the wall were ranged cars of every description, Morris-Cowleys, Lancias, Citroens, Renaults. A place of honour was held by a black, homely-looking vehicle, with whose outline one was not unfamiliar. It bore the label: 'The Fifteenth Million Ford.'

We entered a smaller room. Here was the centre of activities. I stood in the doorway, searching for Ford himself. Ah! there he was. He was demonstrating, with charming gravity, a step which was, I believe, a favourite with our grandfathers, known as the five-step. One glides, lifts the foot, brings it next to the other foot, and slides again. Or if one doesn't do that one does something very like it. It is surprisingly graceful, it arouses no illicit passions, and it agitates the diaphragm sufficiently to give the illusion, if not the reality, of exercise. And the music was exquisite.

'I chose that violinist out of twenty-seven first-class performers,' Ford said to me, later in the evening.

'But it isn't difficult music –' I suggested.

'No. But the others hadn't got the spirit of it. They played as though they were wanting to play jazz.'

'Where do you get the music?'

'I have a secretary who does nothing but look after this band.'

And he was off again, energetically pointing and sliding. I rejoiced in his enthusiasm and picked up a book from a pile which was lying by my side. It

was called 'Good Morning,' and it bore for a subtitle:

'After a sleep of twenty-five years, old-fashioned dancing is being revived by Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford.'

This was interesting, and at that time it also seemed a little incongruous. One said to oneself: 'Here is a man who has devoted the major part of his life to making the world ride more quickly. And now he is devoting his latter years to making it dance more slowly. What is the explanation?'

I turned to the preface for an answer. And as I read it, I straightened my back, and unconsciously assumed a correct attitude. For from those pages there drifted the faint but unique odour of Mr. Turveydrop.

'Denunciation of the dance by the protectors of public morals has usually been occasioned by the importations of dances which are foreign to the expressional needs of our people. With characteristic American judgment, however, the balance is now shifting toward that style of dancing which best fits the American temperament.'

I glanced over to Mr. Ford. The American temperament was in full swing in his particular quadrille. Everybody was 'honouring' their 'corner ladies' in exactly the way in which 'corner ladies' should be honoured. Movements were proceeding, troops were manœuvring with the most delicate precision.

I re-opened the book, and a fresh whiff of Mr. Turveydrop, stronger than ever, assailed my nostrils.

It came from a passage headed: 'Suggestion as to the limbs.' Eager to learn what was suggested as to the limbs, I read that 'not rigidity of the limb, but straightness with easy flexibility gives the dancer a more active foot and adds style to the dance.'

Throughout this book, let it be observed, legs are always limbs. Just that, and nothing more.

I only glanced at one more passage in the book,—which told me that 'the strong odour of tobacco is objectionable both to ladies and gentlemen. There are slovenly smokers who saturate themselves with the oil of tobacco smoke until close proximity to them becomes extremely unpleasant.'

And with that I closed the book with a snap. I had gained a very imperfect impression of Henry Ford.

Owing to his courteous invitation I was able to right that impression on the morrow, but for the moment I did not particularly care whether I righted it or not. I was too interested in 'exercising my limbs in an unwonted manner.' And had my 'corner lady' only paid more attention to the business in hand, and less to Henry Ford, I should have enjoyed it even more than I did. Perhaps, however, it was my fault, for I was also watching him. He is magnetic, even in a quadrille.

On the following morning I rose at the hour of nine, and by ten o'clock I was already speeding down the same road which I had traversed a few hours before. In the unbecoming light of dawn (dawn, you must remember, is a state of mind, not an hour),

the outskirts of Detroit looked desolate and forlorn. Tall iron skeletons stalked across the skyline, roped to one another with vast cables, like mechanical convicts chained for the purposes of civilization. Flooded fields reflected sullenly a sky of frozen grey. Now and then one would pass a cluster of gaunt trees, and the landscape was dotted with wooden houses, scarred and grey, prematurely aged. We passed a great building which, according to my chauffeur, was Ford's broadcasting station. Soon, a sign flashed by, bearing the specious words 'Welcome to Dearborn,' and I knew that we had almost arrived.

While I was waiting for him, talking to one of the innumerable secretaries, I gained further insight into the immensity of his interests. One of the tables was littered with pamphlets which reminded me that Ford was not only a maker of motor-cars but an emperor of many industries. I saw pictures of Ford forests, and Ford coal mines, and Ford docks. In the blue skies above these possessions fluttered Ford fliers. It made me feel dizzy to think of all these things, and that dizziness had not left me when, a few moments later, a door opened, and he came in. So, as soon as we had seated ourselves, I said to him:

Myself: I cannot imagine how you carry everything in your head. All these coal mines and forests and railways, problems of markets and advertising and export – Doesn't it sometimes keep you awake at night?

Ford: No, it never worries me in the least.

Myself: But supposing you have some invention

which isn't working out right, supposing the inspiration won't come –

Ford: If the inspiration won't come, it won't; and that's an end of it. Knowledge is outside you. It's in the air. You can't breed it in yourself.

Myself: Then if it's outside you, is there any way you can help it to get in?

Ford: Certainly. By concentration. By wanting it tremendously. By getting into the mood when it seems the most important thing in your life.

Myself: Are you always in such a mood?

Ford: Certainly. If I didn't progress I should cease to exist. (Abruptly.) *The only permanent thing in life is change.*

I was not prepared for that. I had not brought my epigrams with me. However, Ford has this gift, that if he likes you, he instantly creates an atmosphere of such intimacy that you plunge into the deeps of conversation without any preliminaries. Which is precisely what we did.

Ford (again): The only permanent thing in life is change.

Myself (after a moment): That may be. But what is your opinion of the object of that change? There is something a little desolating in the idea of only a blind and perpetual transition.

Ford: The object of it all is experience. That's all you can get out of life. That's all you are here for. If you are in this world for anything else, I should be very much obliged if you would tell me what it is.

I was not sure what he meant by 'experience,' and recalling the Platonic thesis that human behaviour

flows from the three main sources of desire, emotion and knowledge, I asked him if his conception of 'experience' might also be classified under these three headings. But he showed no wish to indulge in that form of intellectual card-indexing. Experience to him was experience, an individual matter which each man could sort out for himself. And so I switched the subject back to firmer ground. Before wandering into metaphysics, I felt that it would be as well to clear the ground about my feet. I began to talk about his museum, his village, his researches among antiques. His eyes lit up.

'That's part of it all over there,' he said. And he pointed to a bookcase which, on inspection, proved to be lined with copies of McGuffey's Readers.

For the benefit of those who did not peruse these volumes in childhood, it may be observed that McGuffey's Readers, some forty years ago, formed an essential part of the curriculum of innumerable school children throughout America. It was in these pages that they first learnt the alphabet, progressing by easy stages from single words to vivid pictures of contemporary life. It is possible that the high moral tone of the Readers has left a permanent mark upon American psychology, for it is difficult to peruse them without feeling distinct uplift. Consider, for example, this little poem in prose, which Ford handed to me:

Ellen: See mam-ma, what puss has done!

Mother: What has puss done?

Ellen: Why, mam-ma, she has spoiled my doll. See, its head is bro-ken, and its clothes are all soiled.

Mother: I am ve-ry sor-ry, my dear. But how did puss get your doll?

Ellen: I went to play with broth-er Lew-is, and left doll-y on the floor. Puss saw her there, and pulled her in the dirt. Oh, how I hate puss!

Mother: Stop, my child, do not use that naugh-ty word. (I have no space to continue this tragedy *in extenso*. But to alleviate anxiety, one may quote the harmonious close):

Ellen: Then, mam-ma, I am sor-ry I struck puss. I shall nev-er do so a-gain, but will love her more than ev-er.

My own feeling is that this child will grow up into what the American Press so luridly describes as a 'slayer,' but perhaps this is due to prejudice.

I glanced over these books with Ford, sharing his amusement, and I am bound to admit, his affection, for their contents. The later volumes consist of an admirable anthology of extracts, in poetry and prose, ranging in variety from the Bible, Shakespeare and Dr. Johnson to Edgar Allan Poe and Mrs. Hemans. I was aware that he was able to recite by heart almost any of these later poems, and I was curious to discover in which direction his tastes would lie. He could not more exquisitely have illustrated his philosophy than when he handed me a copy of the Sixth Reader, and said, as he pointed to a poem on the open page:

'I think I've gained as much from that poem as from anything I ever read.'

I glanced at it. It was Longfellow's 'Psalm of Life.'

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

'Tell me not, in mournful numbers,
Life is but an empty dream!
For the soul is dead that slumbers
And things are not what they seem.

Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way;
But to act, that each to-morrow
Finds us further than to-day.

The whole of Henry Ford's philosophy is contained in those first three stanzas. Literally, the whole of it. It explains in a nutshell his energy, his ceaseless endeavour. It fits in with his theory of reincarnation. It expresses his view that we are here neither for the set purpose of happiness or of grief, but of 'experience.' It tallies completely with his theory of progress. In a word, it is the only possible poem which could be the favourite of the man who made the old Ford car, and it is the only possible poem which could continue to be the favourite of the man who has made the new. Anything I can say after that poem can only be in the nature of a paraphrase.

Consider, as one instance, the phrase 'to act, that each to-morrow finds us further than to-day,' and regard it in its relation to the rapid development of

mechanical civilization. (I cannot doubt that Ford has so regarded it.) And then consider this brief dialogue.

Myself: Machinery frightens me.

Ford: I don't understand.

Myself: I mean, the lightning rapidity of machinery's development frightens me. What is going to happen in the end?

Ford: Men will make better machines.

Myself: But won't there come a day when men can't make better machines? When the ultimate machine will have been created?

Ford: No.

Quick as a flash, he continued along another line of thought. This time it was an elaboration of 'dust thou art, to dust returnest, was *not* spoken of the soul' – an elaboration of that theme, combined with the theme which had just preceded it.

Ford: You have to keep up to date. You can't slow down. The minute you cease to progress, you don't merely stand still, you cease to exist.

Myself: For what reason?

Ford: For every reason. (A second's pause.) I myself am a believer in reincarnation. This is an age of flying. I believe that the people who are flying today, whose minds are in the vanguard of progress, will be the first people to return to earth after their death.

This idea was so new to me that I was unable at the time to offer any comment upon it. That inability persists to this moment. To express Ford's contention in terms of actuality (provided I have not

misconstrued him), is to picture the next generation as being largely populated with ex-aviators. The idea, if contemplated even momentarily, is a grisly one, and perhaps I have no right to contemplate it. I remember even now, feeling that there was 'something in' what Ford said, but only in the sense that there was 'something in' Poe's extraordinary essay on the universe, 'Eureka.' 'Eureka' was a perfect example of the wild flights of a man of genius when he leaves his native skies of thought. Ford's 're-incarnation of the up-to-date' might well be placed in the same category.

It did not, indeed, take me long to discover that much as Ford knew, there was also a great deal that he did not know. His brain shines brilliantly in a narrow circle. When he strays outside that circle, he is apt to stumble strangely. I had been somewhat prepared for this incongruity by the story of a young English friend of mine who visited Ford during the recent coal strike. They talked about England, and my friend, Lord G—, mentioned the disastrous results upon English industry for which the strike was responsible.

'Coal strike?' Ford is alleged to have said. 'Have they got much coal in England?'

I repeat that story for what it is worth. I should not have remembered it at all had it not been for a somewhat similar example which occurred during my own conversation with him. Here it is:

I had been talking about Australia, and the comparative stagnation of that great continent. I had better hurry quickly over that part of the argument,

for when I think how Australia is being hampered by the perversity of a few native demagogues, I find it difficult to restrain my vocabulary. Let us therefore pass on to the moment when I said to Ford:

'There is a legend that you offered to buy Tasmania from the British, in order to set up a factory there. It would be the best thing that could happen in that part of the world. Is it true?'

'Tasmania?' Ford looked at me blankly. 'What's Tasmania?'

I found myself at a loss. I felt rather like a majority of the House of Commons must have felt when Mr. Lloyd George blankly asked 'Where's Teschen?' One could not explain to Mr. Ford that Tasmania was one of the largest islands in the Southern Hemisphere.

With any other man in his position one might feel inclined to resent such ignorance. One might say to oneself: 'Here is a man who is rich beyond the dreams of avarice. Here is a man who owns coal-mines, railroads, forests, a man at whose whim the markets of the entire world are shaken, a man who has in his control the destinies of millions of people. And he has not even an elementary knowledge of geography! Is it not dangerous that such a man should have such immense power?'

The answer is in the negative. One does not resent Ford's lapses into ignorance, for two reasons – personal and general. Firstly, as far as he himself is concerned, he has not the least desire to claim omniscience. He would be brusque enough to anybody who attempted to tell him how to make a car,

but on other matters he is as eager a learner as a model school child. He is not ashamed to say 'I don't know.' Witness a chance remark which he made to me when he was telling me of his forthcoming visit to England.

'One of the minor reasons I'm going over there is to buy some of the old, early railroad engines,' he said. '*They could fool me on antiques*; but I don't think they could fool me on an engine.'

The second reason why one does not resent the gaps in Ford's intelligence has nothing to do with his personal modesty. It is concerned rather with his general principles in world affairs. Take, as an example, the fiasco of his peace ship expedition during the War. To me, that is one of the sublime failures of history. It is true that nobody with even an elemental knowledge of the European situation would ever have launched that trusting vessel, but it is also true that nobody with an elemental sense of decency would have laughed at it. Ford was animated by the finest of all social desires, a love of peace. The fact that we Europeans had created a situation in which that love had only to be manifested to be made ridiculous, was our tragedy, not his. And as far as I am concerned, so long as he continues to believe in peace – which will be till the end of his life – he can go on amassing more and more power, and if he wishes, can hold the opinion that Tasmania is a disease affecting sheep. Which is not so very far from the truth.

It is this virgin intelligence on international affairs which gives to his opinions their true value.

No notion so glorious or so grotesque as the peace ship could have sprung from a brain tired with knowledge. The brain from which it sprang was a brilliant brain set free in unexplored territory. And we cannot afford to ignore the conclusions of such a brain, even if we think we have advanced beyond them.

Take his opinion of Mussolini as an example. I had observed on his desk a copy of the magazine section of the *New York Times*. The front page was occupied by an article headed 'Ford is shown to be the Mussolini of industry.'

Myself: That seems to be rather an inapt comparison. What, by the way, do you think of Mussolini?

Ford: Somebody's back of him, of course. It isn't just Mussolini. Anyway, the situation over there is only temporary.

Myself: Then do you think the situation in Russia is only temporary, too?

Ford: Certainly. I shouldn't be surprised if the British were in Russia before long. Everything seems to point that way. A good thing, too.

This interested me intensely. I had been wanting him to talk about my country, but had left it to his own initiative. He talked now, freely, and with that same mixture of insight and *naïveté* which gives to all his opinions their fascination.

Ford: Do you know what I think about England? I think that Englishmen are the only people fit to colonize the world. And when they colonize, they stabilize. They stabilized America. The early Eng-

lish colonists laid the foundation of all that is best in America. They were hard. They were workers. They went up to the North, to the mountains. They were daunted by nothing.

Myself: Do you think, then, that there's a quality in the English character which other nations don't possess?

Ford (after a pause): Yes, I do. But you must also remember that one of the reasons why the English make such good colonizers is because they're so miserable at home.

Myself (in great surprise): What do you mean by that?

Ford: Well – they have so much to suffer. They're overcrowded. They're always cold. They're overtaxed.

I could not disagree with any of these contentions, but I had not time to present counter-arguments. The only reason for staying in England that instantly suggested itself was one's capacity for drinking a certain cool dark liquid in a country inn, and that, I knew, would not appeal to Mr. Ford. Besides, he was developing his argument.

Ford: I don't know how the English stand for some of that taxation.

Myself: Do you think it will affect the English sales of your cars?

Ford: I've got a feeling that we shall get over that somehow or other.

Talking of his English factory made me want to know his opinion of certain English cars. I knew that he was too great a man ever to adopt an air of

patronage, but I thought I detected a certain note of superiority in his allusions to some other cars which I mentioned.

Myself: Do you know the – (mentioning a well-known English light car)? They tell me it's pushed the Ford off the road as far as England is concerned.

Ford (nonchalantly): Yes. I've got one. A friend of mine said the other day that it wasn't possible to get into that car in the ordinary way. He said you had to draw it on like a glove!

Myself: I've got a – (mentioning an equally well-known French car). What do you think of that car?

I gathered that he thought as little of it as I thought myself. He also appeared to know a great deal more. I said to him:

Myself: Do you think our main handicap in Europe is due to our labour system?

Ford: What do you mean?

Myself: Well, take one example. I have never quite understood the economic basis of your five-day week. The explanation they usually offer is that under a five-day week a workman is fresher and fitter to produce good work than under the old system. Is that all there is to it?

Ford: No. There are other things to consider. For one thing, a five-day-a-week workman is a better *customer* than the other chap.

Myself: How do you mean?

Ford: Well, he doesn't sit at home, doing nothing, on that extra day. He spends, consumes in some way or other.

Myself: But if you carry that principle to its logical conclusion, the best customer of all would be the man who doesn't work at all. He would be able to spend all the week long.

Ford (a little impatiently): Then don't carry it to its logical conclusion. There's a balance in all these things. It's for the employer to find that balance.

And there, Time, rather than inclination, drew our conversation to a close. I thought of the lines from his favourite poem:

> And departing, leave behind us
> Footprints on the sands of time.

Henry Ford had certainly left very clear footprints on the sands of my part of the beach. He had fascinated me far more than I had expected, and that fascination had been in no way due to the Ford legend or the Ford wealth, which, during the major part of our conversation, I had entirely forgotten. Rather was it exercised by a mind which was less shackled, less prejudiced than any mind I had previously encountered – the mind of a child of genius, with a child's intuition and a child's eagerness.

'Do you want to see my museum?' asked Ford.

'If I've time . . .'

'You haven't. It would take you years. Still, I'd like you to glance through it.'

I went out with the secretary, through the immense research building, across a yard where one of the new Fords was standing, having been exposed to the elements for months in order to test its power of resistance, and entered the museum.

The building was vast. Gallery after gallery was stacked with objects of every conceivable kind. American social history crowded in upon one at every turn. There were glittering stacks of glass, ranging from the common cinnamon-coloured vessels that were in everyday use some fifty years ago, to the big bloated jars, filled with blues and greens and reds which used, in the old days, to lure the simple into chemists' shops. There were enough old beds to give a battalion rest, and enough old cupboards to satisfy a thousand housewives.

Everything that had been part of the life of the American people, everything that was passed or passing, seemed to be housed within these tall wooden walls. There were street organs, battered and worn, but still sufficiently active to emit a brazen cackle when I turned the handle, frightening a group of workmen into fits. There were coloured prints, and fire-irons, and stacks of books, and harmoniums and statues and velocipedes. And, of course, there were masses of vehicles, from the old stage-coach that used to plough through acres of mud, to the first 'flivver,' still in working order.

Among those engines was one which caught my attention. I know nothing about engines and can only say that this one was of a pretty shade of yellow, though its outline struck me as needlessly grotesque. I asked my companion what it was for.

'That's the machine Henry Ford used to work when he was a labourer. He used to go round repairing machines for the farmers. They laughed at him at first, because he looked so young. But they

soon stopped laughing.' He patted the thing affectionately, and then added: 'Ford told me once that whatever work he was doing, he always kept on his white collar. *And however dirty the work was, he always kept that collar clean.*'

Which I think might well be written as an epitaph of Henry Ford.

The end of this story must be written by Lizzie herself, for outside one of the new Fords was waiting to carry me back to Detroit. By the time these words appear in print, there will be nothing very thrilling about a new Ford. The whole world will be riding in them – whither, whence and with what object the world alone can tell. But as I saw that car on this particular morning, it was still a romantic object. It had only just emerged from clouds of secrecy. Its brothers and sisters were still appearing tardily – production was only beginning to get under way. None of my friends, as yet, had ridden in them.

I stepped into the car gingerly, as though it might at any moment dissolve into the fabric of a dream. I recalled a proud remark which Ford had made to me, an hour before, as to its possibilities – 'I turned a corner yesterday at sixty miles an hour in one of the new cars, and it held the ground perfectly.' I did not want to turn any corners at sixty miles an hour, and I said so to the chauffeur, who had rather a wild expression in his eye.

He merely smiled, pressed the accelerator, and shot down the long drive.

It seemed to me that we passed everything on the road. I remember only a smooth hum, a comfortable

seat, and a sense of buildings flashing by like phantoms hardly visualized. But I did not care. For the chauffeur told me that his wife came from England, and more than that, from Devonshire. That touched me deeply, for a few days of Detroit are apt to bear hardly on any Devon man. So, as I wandered into my hotel, a little tired, I had forgotten all about Ford. I was thinking only of red earth, and rain-swept skies, and clotted cream, and water that is iced by nature rather than by man. This mood lasted until dinner-time, and for all I know, they are still talking in that hotel of the singular foreigner who would not be satisfied with the cream which they offered him and left the room in disgust after the sixth attempt to clear his table of ice water.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

These Materialists

I WROTE down on a large sheet of paper, before beginning this book, a list of Forbidden Subjects. One of them, as previously stated, was 'New York Skyline.' Another was 'Steam Heat.' A third was 'Lack of Family Life.' A fourth was 'Vastness of the Continent.' But, in the largest letters of all, I wrote the word 'Prohibition.'

Every bore in Christendom has had his say about Prohibition. I do not mind the fanatics, who shout, above the din of popping corks, that it is working splendidly. They, at least, have something of the imaginative fervour of the artist. Nor do I mind the wine-bibbers, who rage furiously together in an artificial indignation against something which does not exist. I do, however, take exception to the dreary horde of foreign journalists, politicians, and whatnots who visit America, guzzle quantities of champagne at various hospitable houses, and then return to the land of Hope and Glory, licking their lips, with the universal sentence 'Prohibition is a Farce.'

Prohibition is not a farce. It is a poem. That is why I must break my vow, and write about it.

I

Prohibition is a poem because it has added an infinite variety of subtle colours to the canvas of American life. It has sent bands of buccaneers careering down a thousand Main Streets, giving the inhabitants a shock of which they were sorely in

need. It has revived the fine and manly sport of piracy, with all its star-lit memories of battle on sea and shore. It has given a new lease of life to those delicate and sensitive spirits who found the wear and tear of modern business too much for their nerves, and preferred to work in secret for the satisfaction of those who could appreciate their art. To the dullest dinner it has added something of the thrill which must have come to all those who dined with the Borgias, for who knows what powerful poisons may lurk even in the palest Bronx? Prohibition, in fact, is the one thing which was needed to make America a land fit for æsthetes to live in.

Consider the bootleggers. As a class, they are charming. I number several of them among my closest friends. They are, of course, a little exclusive, and are apt to pay too much attention to their social position. But once that they have satisfied themselves that one is presentable, they expand in the most enchanting manner.

On my first day in New York I received a post card, sent through the open mail. On it were printed the words:

'Billy Baxter has moved in the
most exclusive circles, including
those of King George, Johnny Walker,
the Haig Brothers, etc., etc.

'If you wish to become acquainted with
Billy Baxter's friends, call up number . . .'

I never met Billy Baxter, but I met several of his business associates. One of them, – a pale, Rossetti-

like youth, who played Scarlatti quite exquisitely, – showed me many of the secrets of his fascinating craft. He had a large room in his apartment fitted with bottles and pipes and casks, and it amused me to sit back, at midnight, and watch him move about, somewhat languidly, among his toys. He would hold up a phial of yellow liquid to the light, rejoice in its colour, savour its aroma, sip it and pronounce it good. Then he would turn on a tap and watch the bubbles sparkle in a big tank of gin. He was very proud of his gin. He said that it was really too good for the average customer, since it was purer than the real gin which was smuggled in from England. In fact, at one time, being piqued by the convention that forced him to put another man's signature on to his own creations, he designed a very beautiful label of his own, which bore the inscription:

Gin Diable.
New York. 1925.

And underneath, in small green letters, 'Buy American.'

As a rule, however, he took too keen a pleasure in deceit, for its own sake, to trouble about forcing his own personality upon his customers. To see him produce bottle after bottle of genuine old Cointreau was a liberal education. The manufacture of the liqueur itself was an easy matter – it was merely a question of mixing the right quantities of alcohol, syrup and orange flavouring. But the ageing of the corks – the yellowing of the labels – the tying of the ribbons – the stamping of the seals – in these things

he was supreme. And when he sold a case to one of his clients, he had always some new and fantastic story to tell as to how he had secured it, while his eyes would light up with the spiritual fervour of the born liar.

It seems to me immoral, when one thinks of the happy life led by such young men as this, to suggest the repeal of the laws which make such a life possible. Had it not been for Prohibition he might have been leading a tiresome, honest life in a bank, adding up figures, with misery in his heart.

But it is not on account of the bootleggers that I am so ardent a Prohibitionist. It is on my own account. The disappearance of the 'speak-easy' would be an infinite loss to all romanticists. Who, having experienced the delights of the speak-easy, would wish to sacrifice them for the boredom of the ordinary restaurant? Who, having slunk down the little flight of steps into the area, glancing to right and left, in order to make sure that no police are watching, having rung the bell before the apparently deserted door, having blinked at the suddenly lighted *grille*, and assured the proprietor, whose face peers through the bars, of his bona fides, – who would willingly forfeit these delicious preliminaries? And who, having taken his seat in the shuttered restaurant, having felt all the thrill of a conspirator, having jumped at each fresh ring of the bell, having, perhaps, enjoyed the supreme satisfaction of participating in a real raid – who would prefer, to these excitements, a sedate and legal dinner, even if all the wines of the world were at his disposition?

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No, America owes an immense artistic debt to Prohibition. For one thing, it has prevented the Americans from growing smug. The Continent was conquered, policed, tranquil. It had reached that dreary stage which, according to the history books, was reached in England in the days of Alfred the Great, when even the most timid virgin could walk across England without being molested by brutal men – which was probably the reason why virgins, in those days, stayed at home.

But now . . . Here is an example. I am walking down Broadway with a friend. There looms towards us a man of vast bulk and forbidding features, who accosts my friend and engages him in conversation. After a few moments, he touches his cap and goes off. And as we walk on, my friend says to me:

'That was a bootlegger down on his luck. Have you any enemies?'

'Why?'

'Because he just told me that if there was anybody I wanted "bumping off" he would take them for a "one-way taxi drive." The fee would be only a hundred dollars.'

Personally I like that sort of thing. Apart from the fact that a hundred dollars is an exceedingly moderate fee for a murder, there is an exhilaration in knowing that murder is abroad. It gives an added savour to the crisp airs of Broadway. It detracts from the dehumanizing effect of perfect telephones, perfect plumbing and perfect elevators.

Prohibition, therefore, has set a great many dull feet dancing. The only danger is that they may dance

too fast. Before I went to America I did not believe it possible that young men would allow themselves to become intoxicated at an ordinary dance. I had never seen anybody intoxicated at a dance in London, and somehow it seemed just one of those things which don't occur. I had not been in New York a week before my eyes were opened. It happened at a party in Park Avenue. I arrived at about midnight. As I stepped into the hall I saw a little procession coming towards me. Three young men were being carried out, senseless. At first I thought that some terrible accident had happened – an explosion – the collapse of an elevator – perhaps even a triple murder. And then I realized that they were merely drunk.

These lapses are particularly regrettable among a people whose manners, on most other occasions, are irreproachable. Nor was this little incident exceptional. I can remember very few parties at which somebody did not get drunk. How, indeed, can they help it? I have seen girls of eighteen drinking neat whisky at five o'clock in the afternoon, rushing on to a cocktail party which lasts till seven-thirty, going to a dinner and drinking all the time, taking nips out of a hip flask during the entr'acts at a theatre, and rounding off the day at another party with cocktail after cocktail.

However, all this sounds rather dull and old-fashioned, and it is the only aspect of Prohibition which I deplore. In all its other aspects it is a perpetual source of delight. I might finish this section with one final story to illustrate how it has brightened everyday life.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

I was motoring, last Easter Sunday, down Fifth Avenue. Just as we had passed one block, we observed that a policeman had held up his hand. We could not stop in time so we had to draw up at the kerb. He came over and told us to pull the car into a side-street and wait. There was nothing else to do, so we did it. After a quarter of an hour, he came over. I have never heard such language. I gazed at him fascinated. The man was a genius. In a rich baritone he attributed our ancestry to dogs, sheep, goats and many other energetic animals. He credited us with the most obscure, indeed the most painful, vices. There was no form of debauchery, apparently, to which we had not long ago sold ourselves.

I leant back enthralled. Suddenly it occurred to me that he deserved a reward. I undid the top of my walking-stick, produced a phial two feet long, filled with whisky, and offered it to our detractor. He took one look at it, and drained it off, in full view of the passers-by.

'Now,' I said hopefully, 'you can go on telling us about our lives.'

But he only grinned, handed back the phial, saluted, and went his way.

So did we.

II

This chapter is headed 'These Materialists.' The title – if I remember rightly – is a faint attempt at irony. It is intended as a challenge to the European essayists who come over from the mists of the Old World to the sunshine of the New, blink their eyes

at a few cities, and pour out a quantity of platitudes about the country at large.

Like all platitudes, these particular platitudes about America are only half true. I chose, as the most obvious example of a half-truth, the platitude that 'prohibition is a farce,' and endeavoured to show you that it is, at least, a divine farce. There are a great many others which I might choose.

Consider, at random, the perennial cry: 'American prosperity is merely a law of Nature.'

There are a great many pompous fools – and I regret to say that they are not unknown in England – who maintain, as an excuse for their own incompetency, that American prosperity is merely the inevitable result of natural wealth. The burden of their thesis is that no people, however stupid or lackadaisical, could possibly fail to wax fat in a continent so lavishly endowed by nature. Such arguments are not only insulting to the American people, but extremely harmful to ourselves, because they encourage us to throw up our hands in despair, to retire from the battle before we have even begun to fight it.

Let us admit the natural advantages of America. But let us also admit something else – something which can only be called the American spirit. I can best illustrate my meaning by a practical example. When I was in Fort Worth, a town of about 110,000 inhabitants, I went one night, out of curiosity, to the local industrial exhibition. It was one of the most amazing examples of civic enterprise I have ever seen. One wandered through whole

streets of exhibits, brilliantly lighted, crowded with rough, eager business men. One was pulled up, time and again, by some particularly ingenious window, or some unusually startling method of advertisement. The amount of energy and imagination which had been put into those windows would have sufficed to run the entire British Empire Exhibition, and even then, there would have been a good deal left over. The candy section alone contained more interesting material than all the dreary miles of bottled gooseberries and stuffed sheep over which we worked ourselves into such a frenzy of Colonial patriotism in the London of 1926. And this, if you please, was the effort of a town of 110,000 inhabitants.

If that exhibition had been held in London we should have talked about the wonderful renaissance of British industry. If it had been held in Birmingham, we should have published special editions of *The Times* to celebrate it. If it had been held in a town of 110,000 inhabitants – but the idea is unthinkable in England. And as long as the idea is unthinkable we shall continue, industrially, to lose ground.

I suppose that I have no right to talk about this subject at all – I know nothing about industry, or international finance. For all I know there may be some complicated economic law which makes it necessary for our own great manufacturers to hide their lights under a bushel – to endeavour to persuade their competitors that they are not really manufacturing things at all – that they are merely playing

a pleasant game, and would be insulted at the suggestion that they desired customers. If that is so, then we are certainly succeeding beyond our wildest dreams.

III

Another parrot-cry which irritates me to distraction is that America is a nation of braggarts. This cry is echoed, with shrill monotony, by so many people that one can hardly enumerate them – by impoverished aristocrats who have not succeeded in selling either themselves or their furniture, by unsuccessful journalists, out-of-work actresses, frostbitten Polish pianists, diabetic German philosophers, epicine Cambridge professors – by all that twitching, twittering crew of imbeciles who are discharged, as though in disdain, by every ship that sails into New York harbour.

Of course they are braggarts. They would be fools if they weren't. But the American pride of achievement is so vital, so unashamed that it partakes, as Lord Bryce once observed, of 'a tinge of ideality.'

You cannot understand the enthusiasm of the American people for their own home-towns until you have undertaken a tour involving a great many short stops at a quantity of cities. However short the stop, you have to see the city. You are pushed into an open car and hustled down the street before you have had time to light the cigar which they have pushed into your mouth. Says the first guide:

Now, Mr. Nichols, we'd like you to see our resi-

dential section.' (I always thought that this meant the red light district until I was corrected.)

Says the second: 'We're planning a new Town Hall in this area that will be the largest building within a thousand miles.'

Says a third: 'When our new tramway system is completed you'll be able to ride eighty miles without changing and without going over the same rail twice.'

Says a fourth: 'That is our new repertory theatre. We have an actress there that's going to be heard of in New York before very long. But she don't want to leave her home-town. No, *sir*!'

And, surprising as it may seem, it is quite possible that she doesn't.

I wish I could meet an Englishman who could express such enthusiasm. I cannot imagine any inhabitant of Liverpool, for example, showing any real anxiety to parade his 'residential section' before distinguished foreigners. Even if such a section existed, and even if he knew where it was, he would not wish to draw attention to it. He would infinitely prefer to comment upon the rotten climate and the Bolshevism in the slums.

IV

Most of all, however, do I resent the injustice of certain Englishmen who appear to resent the way in which Americans are 'buying up Europe.' 'From time to time an individual or an institution in America purchases an old English house with the object of transporting it bodily across the Atlantic. Instantly there is an outcry in the English Press.

One would imagine that somebody was about to kidnap the Prince of Wales.

Why? If we don't want to sell it, we needn't. If we *have* to sell it, we should accept the inevitable, and keep quiet about it. In any case it seems strange that we should only discover our affection for old buildings when they are coveted by somebody else. During the last ten years in London we have cheerfully submitted to an appalling holocaust of old buildings. And with very few protests we have allowed to be erected, in their stead, a series of architectural monstrosities which are calculated to induce a nervous breakdown in anybody who is brave enough to contemplate them. As long as we continue to endure, for instance, the obscene mess which has sprung up, like a line of evil, misshapen toad-stools down Regent Street, we have no sort of justification for protesting against the wholesale removal of our old buildings. We ought to be thankful that they are being taken to a safe place.

I have space for one example to illustrate the manner in which Americans treat their treasures when they get them. Not far from Boston, on the edge of a lake, their lives a young man called John Hayes Hammond. He is, as you may be aware, one of the most brilliant scientific intelligences of our age, but he is more than that, – he is an artist. Not long ago he brought over from France two little medieval houses. Nobody knew what he was going to do with them. He hardly knew himself. He only knew that they were beautiful and that he needed a setting for their beauty. That setting he proceeded

to provide. He caused the two houses to be rebuilt exactly as they had stood, and round them he designed a small courtyard, perfectly proportioned, fashioned of bricks for which he had ransacked the world. Everything that could possibly be done to make those houses feel at home was done; – French flowers were placed at their feet, French workmen tended them. And from that courtyard, gradually, there grew the rest of the house, slowly, magnificently. It was not a 'period' house. He had more sense than that. It was a house of many periods, as are all great European houses – a century here, a century there. The whole thing was given a unity by the passionate love of the man who caused it to be fashioned.

I don't think we need worry about those portions of our old country which go to take their place in the sun.

I wrote the foregoing laudatory remarks while I was in America. I still believe them to be true. But on the day after I had written them I felt like tearing the pages to shreds. For I had been suddenly summoned to Baltimore, and I had stood at the grave of Edgar Allan Poe . . . and . . .

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

At the Grave of Poe

WOULD the bells never stop? They clanged and clanged, in a maddening monotone, torturing his rest. They were the bells of the trams that perpetually sweep down Fayette Street, a few yards from his grave, which lies in the centre of the city. One heard them in the distance, as the trams roared over the hill-crest, and as they drew nearer, the clamour was more and more persistent, until, at the cross-road, it echoed out in a deafening peal. Then there would be a pause, a roar of iron wheels, and the tram was off again. But the next was already on its way – down in the smoky valley. One heard it like a distant note of warning. Would the bells never stop?

I stood at Poe's grave, trying to think. After all, it was more through him than through any other man that I found myself in America on this rainy day. I remembered an old English library, where, as a boy, I had read his essay on 'The Rationale of Verse' – that strange and fascinating document in which he set down, coldly and mechanically, the methods by which he wrote 'The Raven.' I had not fully understood it, but even then, it gripped my imagination like a detective story. I felt the same sort of thrill which many boys feel when they are witnessing the construction of some complicated machine. That thrill has remained with me ever since. It gave me a longing to know how things were done, to study the inside of the most marvellous

machine of all, the mind of an author, to compare those machines, to try to discover their separate secrets. That longing had taken me to strange lands, had brought me face to face with many amazing men, had probably moulded my entire life. And it had all begun with Poe's essay. Do you wonder that when I came to Baltimore my first impulse was to lay a wreath on his grave? And do you wonder, when I saw what manner of grave it was, that I was filled with a profound misery?

I wanted to think, but it was impossible. The noise was deafening. There was a perpetual rattle of lorries over cobbled streets, a clanking of engines from a neighbouring station. And those bells – those bells! – would they never stop?

I looked at the hideous grave. It is a monument six feet high, carved from marble which was once white but has now faded to a dirty yellow. It has about it the hue of vulgar death. At its base a metal sign is stuck into the earth, rather unsteadily, bearing the legend, 'Keep off the grass. Five dollars fine.' But – alas! It is an empty threat, for there is no grass. Only a little earth, with a few brown weeds straggling over the surface.

There is a plaque in the centre of the monument. From it there stares the face of Poe, white and distracted. The workmanship is crude and jejune, but by some accident, the face gives one a feeling of terror and unrest. It is the face of a prisoner who is condemned, not to a penalty of death but to the penalties of life. Poe never overcame his fear of being buried alive, and as I stared at that blurred white image I

knew that they *had* buried him alive. They had taken his spirit, and shut it in a box, and they had forced open his eyes, to stare and stare . . . on what?

On tarnished sky-signs, and buildings of scabrous brick, on twisted iron girders. On blank windows filmed with dirt, on graves that totter in drunken disorder, on a church that mocks the only God he ever adored, the God of Beauty. From dawn till night he is imprisoned there, while the wild marble eyes stare at a world he does not comprehend – a world that has painted its creed in staring letters on the opposite walls – 'Try Salad King' in yellow, 'Use American Gas' in blue, 'Amoco Cars' in blue.

I shivered, and turned away.

My one comfort lay in the fact that on this day Nature, at least, was turning towards him the face he loved, the grey face, the face of despairing sorrow. 'The skies they were ashen and sober . . .' But there could be little of the nobility of grief in such surroundings. The rain beat fitfully against the tomb, and as it trickled down it left lines like the lines on a dirty cheek. Patches of snow still lay on the ground – they had cleared it away from every part of the city but the graveyard – and it was the saddest snow I have ever seen, pockmarked and grey, lingering long after its appointed time. The wind caught at the leaves of some ivy which was struggling for life against the wall behind, making it shiver and sigh, as though at the futility of trying to cling on any longer. And ever and anon, a cloud of smoke invaded the graveyard, to linger, acrid and yellow, round the stones, like a wraith of a soul that is damned.

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It's all wrong! You put up monuments of loveliness and grace to men of blood and you imprison the most delicate soul America has ever produced in an obscenity like this! Your soldiers and your admirals, the men who led your fathers to death, your politicians and your millionaires – the men who grew rich from your fathers' sweat – *them* you commemorate with grandeur and with beauty. But Poe – Poe, who knew no happiness, Poe who saw his wife die in poverty, holding a cat in her arms in a vain endeavour to keep herself warm – Poe you treat like this.

What would I do about it, then? I should tear down that monument, and bear him away. I should take him far from the sound of bells, into airs that were clean and tranquil, to rugged hills, far flung beneath an empty sky. There would be cypress, and the sound of rushing water. There would be a dark forest where he might rove by day and a simple stone where he might rest by night. There should be belladonna for the author of Ulalume, and wild white hyacinths for the author of Helen. There should be solitude and immensity, and on his grave they should carve no pious platitudes, should place no mocking mottoes. They should write the single word – Nevermore.

And yet . . . perhaps by its very horror, his present grave is his most fitting monument. It is more desolate than any image he ever conceived, more gruesome than his bloodiest fancies. And if the object of a man's grave is to be the symbol of his life, the resting place of Edgar Allan Poe is grimly appropriate.

It was evening before I returned to my hotel. I had spent a strenuous day, and mercifully there had been but little time to remember Poe or my feelings about him.

When I entered my room, I discovered that the management, in my absence, had very kindly placed a little book on the desk in my sitting-room. It was entitled '197 *Reasons Why You Should Enthuse Over Baltimore*'. My mind was full of Poe, and as I looked out on to a rain-swept city I could think of only one reason why I enthuse over Baltimore, and that, a melancholy one. I opened the book, and I read:

'*Over* 1,100,000 *hogs are slaughtered in Baltimore every year.*'

Hogs? A million of them? Baltimore? Enthusiasm? My brain tried feebly to grasp the connection between these things, but the only image I could conjure up was that of the Gadarene swine, rushing violently down a steep place into the sea. The image was curiously vivid. I saw the cliffs, which Doré might have drawn, and the lowering clouds, and the black, cluttered multitude of foul animals, leaping, rolling, bellies up, into the dark and tumultuous waters. I could hear a million snarls of terror, see the specks of fire from a million pairs of eyes. Hogs? Baltimore? Enthusiasm? I read on . . .

'*Baltimore sells annually* 800,000,000 *tin cans to packers in the State of New Jersey alone.*'

Tin cans? Eight hundred million of them? This was indeed a strange theory of æsthetics. I cannot claim that I visualized those eight hundred million tin cans, because there are some images so desolating

that the brain is mercifully incapable of evoking them. But, somehow or other, they seemed to gain possession of my spirit. I felt I was living in a tin can world, a world that was cheap and clattering, as bright as a tin can, and as hollow. Fascinated, I continued . . .

'*Females in Baltimore engaged in gainful occupation number* 99,800.'

At that, the spell broke. My sides began to shake. There was a delicious flavour of the eighteenth century in that phrase. I conjured up a laughing wanton, full-bosomed, with lips the colour of cherries, making a shameless promenade down Vauxhall of an evening. I could hear the shocked whispers of respectable matrons as they drew aside their daughters from the contaminating presence. 'What is that Lady doing, Mama?' 'Hush, my Child! She is no Lady. She is a Female engaged in a gainful Occupation.'

And then, the number of these females caught my eye. 99,800? Surely the proportion was over-generous, even for Baltimore? Taking the population as 800,000, that gave one about 400,000 women, of whom surely not more than half could be . . . which meant . . . heavens . . . what did it mean? The prospect of venturing out into the streets, if these statistics were correct, was almost too alarming to contemplate. Quickly, I read the next reason for enthusiasm:

'*Over* 600 *persons in Baltimore are employed in the manufacture of buttons.*'

A quick sigh of relief. That might account for

some of the females, for no people, obviously, would devote their lives to the manufacture of buttons without considerable pecuniary benefit. But only 600 persons were manufacturing buttons. Feverishly I turned the page . . .

'*A tremendous total is also produced of underwear and children's rompers . . .*'

This was better. Infinite comfort was in that word 'tremendous.' I saw more and more of the gainful females being absorbed. I saw them playfully stitching rompers, with a light heart and a song on their lips. And at the next sentence, I knew that all was well. For I read:

'*Soft drink facilities in Baltimore make possible an output of over* 100,000,000 *bottles per year.*'

So, after all, my alarms had been groundless. I should imagine that it would require at least half of the 99,800 females to produce so asphyxiating a quantity of lemonade. And that did not nearly cover their activities, for I found, on further perusal, that I was asked to enthuse over millions of paper drinking-cups, billions of pyjamas, trillions of straw hats, and 'one of the best sewerage systems in the country.'

The only thing over which I was not asked to enthuse was the fact that Poe had honoured Baltimore as his final resting-place.

The booklet sums itself up with the ringing words:

'It is wonderful to see a man enthuse. It is more wonderful, still, to see a city of 796,000 persons enthuse.'

It certainly is.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

According to Otto Kahn

I HAVE met during my life a quantity of millionaires (admitted Mr. Nichols modestly), but I have only met one millionaire who is true to the ideal standards of fiction, and his name you may read at the top of this page.

I have a very definite image in my mind when I speak of the millionaire of fiction – an image arising from an ardent and extensive perusal of the works of Arnold Bennett, Michel Arlen, and, of course, Mr. William le Queux. They are always the same. Their wealth is invariably fabulous. They are unmoved by financial earthquakes. They stand, without flinching, while Wall Street rocks around them. They unravel, with a flick of their fingers, intricate economic entanglements which have baffled the ingenuity of a hundred experts. They are staggeringly generous to their less fortunate rivals . . . And yet, they turn into demons, relentless and implacable, if their partners do not return their lead at no trumps.

That is a very fair and average millionaire of fiction, and also of one real millionaire, Mr. Otto Kahn. I for one should be very sorry if he were ever to alter in any detail. There would be something a little inhuman in a man who could cope with the concentrated stupidity of mankind throughout the day, write out vast cheques for struggling artists, keep his finger on the markets of the world and then come home and smile sweetly at a partner who let him down in a rubber. If I ever met a millionaire who

could do that, I should entertain the gravest suspicions of him and should conclude either that he beat his wife or indulged in nameless vices in the small hours of the morning.

I remember one occasion when Otto Kahn gave a perfect display of the fictional millionaire. (I do not mean that he was acting – I only imply that he is one of those refreshing people whose lives, by the force of their own personality, seem as though they were dictated by a master story-teller.) The scene was laid in a house in New York. Eight men were dining together. As he entered the room, a smile of satisfaction was on his face. There was good reason for that smile. In the last forty-eight hours, by incessant work, by stroke upon stroke of financial genius, by all the arts of persuasion and tact, he had solved an apparently hopeless problem in the railroad world, had produced order out of chaos and had left a quantity of directors, whose meetings had hitherto sounded like a brutal Stravinsky overture, warbling together as harmoniously as the tenors in a Palestrina mass.

All this he had accomplished without a moment's irritation – without, even, the loss of an hour's sleep.

And then, after dinner, playing for very modest stakes, his partner went a small slam in diamonds without holding the ace. Instantly, the air was thick with invective – exceedingly coarse invective too. I sat back, in anguish. Would it be murder? It seemed only too probable. I visualized the headlines: 'Otto Kahn slays partner. Tragic end to bridge game. Famous bridge experts to be summoned for

the defence.' And then, later on, I foresaw the opening speech of his counsel:

'Gentlemen of the jury – this great man, who stands before you on trial for his life, has done only what any honest American citizen would have done. Gentlemen of the jury, you who have daughters, yes, you who have mothers, too, can you look into your hearts, and say, as men, that in slaying, as he did slay, the late Mr. –, can you suggest that he did not rid the world of a pest, of a member of that degenerate and unspeakable class of men who declare small slams without the fundamental necessity, admitted by all decent citizens, of holding the ace?'

Were I a member of that jury, I have not the smallest doubt as to the side on which I should cast my vote.

You may think me flippant in beginning a study of one of America's great men by referring to his outbursts at the card-table, but I cannot dissociate Otto Kahn from bridge. When he asked me, with one of those gestures of hospitality for which Americans are famous, to join a party of friends whom he was taking round the continent, he informed me that it might be as well, in view of the many lengthy train-journeys, to learn bridge before we started. In the circumstances, I would willingly have learned Sanscrit. And so I tried to learn bridge.

But alas – my mind was already erring on the sunlit beaches of Florida, or tasting, in anticipation, the painted joys of Hollywood. I could not concentrate on bridge. I found the phrases grotesque and suggestive. To 'lead through strength' seemed to me to

savour of amorous conquest, to 'take your partner out' only called up for me a vision of a quiet exit from a ballroom, and when I heard the phrase 'an established minor' I could think of nothing but Jackie Coogan. For if ever there was an established minor, it is he. And so, I set out under false colours. But I do not regret it. For I set out with a genius – a genius, too, who had an immense savour for life. And I set out in a special train. What more could any man desire?

Otto Kahn is one of the few men who is often worthy of a Boswell, and I am temperamentally unfitted for acting in that capacity. However, I have a fair memory, and I shall never forget one of the first things he ever said to me:

'I always talk about art to business men, and about business to artists. That is why I still have a certain reputation for wisdom in both camps.'

Nobody but my aforementioned millionaire of fiction could possibly have said that. It is the remark of a born dilletante. But the dilletante, in this case, happens to have succeeded, against tremendous odds, in both fields of endeavour, and for that reason, his words have weight. For that reason, also, I shall try to reproduce some of them.

One day we were talking, in general terms, about freedom. I had encountered one of those little restrictions on one's personal liberty which are not uncommon in America, and I was irritated. Otto Kahn answered me in these words:

'I don't know why you should be irritated. You seem to forget that America is only fifty years old.

It is true that a century before I was born there was a constitution, and a people, and the promise of a nation. But until fifty years ago there was no American character, as such, and American civilization, with its amazing vigour and its unique qualities, had not come into existence.

'That is why there is so little freedom in America. We are not ripe for it. We have a vast continent to lick into shape. We have to instil into millions of new-comers the elementary traditions of citizenship. We can only do that by many arbitrary measures which, to older civilizations, often appear ridiculous. Prohibition is an example of one of those measures. It takes centuries to learn how to drink. It is a taste which can only be matured through the ages. And so – we have to prohibit that taste altogether, just as a schoolmaster forbids his pupils to smoke cigarettes.

'It is utterly different in England,' he continued. 'England has the accumulated wisdom of ages, and she can allow her people to do what they want. That is the reason why so many Englishmen misunderstand America, and so many Americans misunderstand England. You laugh at our schoolboy regulations, not realizing that they are vitally necessary, and we laugh at your antiquated traditions, not realizing that they are the blood and bone of the whole body of the Empire. There is not a single tradition which has not its roots in necessity and common sense. And the Englishman guards those roots, because he knows that if they are ever torn up, the whole structure will fall to the ground.'

He understands England better, I think, than any

American I have ever met. He understands America equally well. Besides his uncanny gift of intuition, he still retains, through his European birth, the capacity to stand aside and view the general scene as an outsider. An example of his understanding of the respective psychology of England and America occurs to me. It is slight, but it is also significant. One day we were driving through the residential section of a big Southern city – I think it was Dallas. There were miles of bright airy streets, flanked by charming houses, gaily painted, with amusing roofs of green and terra-cotta. The only thing which worried me was the fact that all the gardens were open to the street. No wall – no railing even – protected one neighbour from another. As a result, it seemed that these gardens might just as well have been public property. I failed to see how the owners could derive any pleasure from them.

I said to Kahn, 'I have never understood why Americans don't put walls round their gardens.'

'Why should they?'

'Well – a thing isn't your own if you have to share it with all your neighbours. I would rather have six square feet of a mud patch, with my own wall round it, than all of Central Park.'

'Americans don't think like that,' said Kahn. 'I suppose it's a remnant of pioneer days. If a man built a wall round his garden, they would think he was not neighbourly, – they would probably accuse him of being a snob. They might even think he had something to hide. Besides, the American is proud of his garden. He wants everybody to see it. The

difference is really fundamental – the Englishman resents his neighbour, the American welcomes him. A young civilization is far more gregarious than an old one.'

That seemed to me an illuminating comparison. And since he never tired of talking about England, I drew him on still more, for I wanted to learn from a man who, more than any other, could tell me what he honestly thought of England's financial future.

I made the following pessimistic suggestions. I said:

'Our position as a great industrial power was only a fluke. It was due to certain advantages, natural and political, which gave us a running start over the rest of Europe during the nineteenth century. Those advantages have now disappeared. Other nations have adopted our inventions, and absorbed our political experiments. We are faced with the vast mass-production of America and the bitter competition of cheap European labour. Between the two I have an uneasy sense that England must prepare for a century of exceedingly painful attrition, and end in the same position as Spain, with London playing a rôle as a resting-place for tourists.'

Kahn became almost angry. 'You are entirely wrong,' he said, 'and nobody but an Englishman would so grossly undervalue the future of his own country. Englishmen are always prophesying that sort of thing. And they none of them really believe it, any more than you yourself.'

'Let me tell you this,' he went on. 'London will always remain the financial centre of the world and

England will always be a great industrial power. You will find it necessary, of course, to modernize yourselves, to adapt yourselves to changing conditions. You won't like it, you may even sulk about it, but you always have done it, and you always will. And no city in the world will ever be able to compete with London as the first financial centre. Even if it were not geographically the inevitable centre, the fact would remain that London can do work which no other city can do. She is the natural clearing-house, and she is learned in all the duties which, for centuries, have been associated with a clearing-house. I needn't go into intricate details of banking and finance. I can only assure you, as a banker, that it would take countless generations before New York could ever venture to assume the responsibilities which London assumes. And in any case, New York will never have the occasion to do so.'

The memory of the foregoing conversation – inadequately reported, I fear, with but little of his enlivening gift of financial metaphor – has constantly consoled me. It has consoled me as I walk down the London streets, accosted at every turn by beggars – one with matches, one singing a song, another staring blankly at the pavement – all of them tragic symbols of the agony of an Empire. It has consoled me – yes – but not too much.

In the same way was I consoled, when after this trip I came into contact with men who talked about dollars rather more freely than it seemed necessary to talk about them, to recall his words, which, I believe, in essence to be true:

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'I emphatically deny that America is the land of the almighty dollar. I do not think it ever was. I believe that, even in America's most materialistic days, the power of the idea, the impulse of the ideal, were far mightier than the might of the dollar.

'It has never been typical of the American to seek dollars for the sake of sheer possession and accumulation. In the great majority of cases – consciously or perhaps more often intuitively – the dollar to him is an instrument merely, or a token of achievement, the concrete consummation of his ambition to create and construct, of his will to rise, to succeed, to excel.'

During the whole of our journeyings, of which you will read more in later pages, I studied Kahn. I cannot help studying people, for the simple reason that I find it much more difficult to be bored than to be absorbed. And here, certainly, was an absorbing study. For though it might not be true to say that his financial schemes were dependent upon an artist's mood – though he might, not for example, buy a plot of land merely because he had seen a sunset flood it with colour, or a line of railroad because the fields through which it ran were filled with bluebells – yet, he comes nearer to adopting that method of procedure than any other man I have ever met.

I remember two consecutive days – a sunny day and a rainy day – which we spent in a certain enchanted area. It was an area which had great possibilities for development. All around us were men anxious to interest him in their projects. While they were there he said very little, but after they had gone he echoed their enthusiasm, even more resonantly

than they. He stood in the sunlight, visualizing the future. One could see the waste spaces blossoming as he talked of them. Here would rise a building, over there a garden. A road would wind from here to there. There might be a club, with a lofty flight of steps. Already, in imagination, I saw a gay, chattering crowd flock up those steps.

The next day, there were clouds over the sun and a cold wind. And over his mind, too, was a cloud. The visions had vanished. The gardens, the buildings – they were there no more. They had been the children of a mood. And he did not, I understand, interest himself financially in any of the schemes which were brewing in that neighbourhood.

I am not trying to suggest – for it would be ridiculous to do so – that he is an erratic, spasmodic creature of impulse. For all I know, the cold and cloudy day may have had little or no influence upon his ultimate decision in the case I have mentioned. I prefer, however, to think that it had an influence, because I cannot persuade myself that Otto Kahn is not an artist first and a business man second. Only such a man could have used words like these:

'Not even the most profitable transaction of my business career has brought me results comparable in value and in lasting yield to those which I derived from the "investment" of hearing, in my early youth, let us say, Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, or seeing Botticelli's Primavera, or reading the classics of various nations. Moreover, the dividends I received from "investing" in the appreciation of beauty and the cultivation of art were tax exempt.'

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We have our philanthropic millionaires in England, our great magnates who give us an art gallery here, a scholarship there, but I cannot recall any man the rhythm of whose life is so consistently set to music, for whom finance is so decidedly the handmaiden of æsthetics. America is lucky to have him. And yet America deserves him because it was only on the American scene that he could have played so decisive a rôle.

I might write about him for much longer, but quotations are apt to be wearisome. I should like, however, to tell one final story which shows that he carries his æsthetic sense into the furthest fields.

One day he went with Cecil de Mille to see his picture *The King of Kings*. The *tour de force* of this picture was a representation of the Dance of the Golden Calf. He sat back in the darkness watching an indiscriminate whirl of limbs. De Mille said to him: 'Do you know how many people there are in that scene?'

'No. I haven't any idea.'

'Two thousand five hundred.' And then, 'What do you think of that?'

What Mr. Otto Kahn thought of it may be summed up in his reply which consisted in the one word 'Nothing.'

De Mille was not pleased. 'You're highbrow,' he said.

Kahn turned to de Mille.

'Have you ever seen Velasquez' picture of *The Surrender of Breda*?

'No.'

'If you look at that picture,' said Kahn, 'you will have an impression, in the background, of a forest of spears and lances. If you count those lances you will find that there are precisely eighteen.' He smiled sweetly at de Mille through the darkness, and then added: 'Velasquez was an artist.'

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Drift wood

We are now about to speed southwards, in company with Mr. Otto Kahn and various gentlemen of vast importance. And in order that my readers may not turn green and sick with envy, I shall say nothing about the delectable manner in which we travelled. I shall merely draw up the curtain at a singular town which calls itself Palm Beach.

I

Morning.

On a green chair a chameleon was sitting, blinking at me with sly, narrowed eyes. Opposite him was a pink stucco wall. When he jumped on to it, would he too turn pink?

So lazy are the warm airs of Palm Beach even in this month of February that I decided to lie down and wait. I adore chameleons. Theirs is an exquisite insincerity. They are the most shameless turncoats of creation. They realize that to savour life one must utterly surrender to it, and wear oneself the colour of the hour in which one is cast. Therefore they flush to crimson with the rose, and on the marble fountain they are white and chaste. Their souls and their bodies are cool and green in the long summer grass. And as we know, they have only to walk across a Scotch plaid to experience deliciously disturbing sensations.

Would he never jump on to that pink wall? I gave the chair a slight tilt. He winked one eye, opened it

again, and remained entirely still. 'Chameleon,' I said, 'sweet chameleon, please do your stunt. There is a beautiful pink wall in front of you. With one leap, you could jump on to that wall and become somebody quite different. You would undergo a magical and faintly immoral metamorphosis. Chameleon, sweet chameleon, do it, just for once. It must be such fun to lie on yellow sands like a golden idol, or to perch in a purple mood on a hibiscus blossom. Won't you kindly share that fun with me?'

The chameleon did not stir. I could bear it no longer. I gave the chair a sharp push. He leapt on to the pink wall. And, if you please, *he remained as green as grass.*

You will say, of course, that he was not a proper chameleon. But he was. He was *tout ce qu'il y a de plus* chameleon. It merely happens that the chameleons of Palm Beach, like the rest of the inhabitants, have become demoralized. One sees the little beasts everywhere, and always they are misbehaving themselves, – sitting in shameless green on blue walls, or gliding in outrageous pink over the short grass. Even insincerity, in these surroundings, is too strenuous a pose to maintain for ever.[1]

After this disillusioning episode with the chameleon I decided that I would take a walk by the seashore. No sooner did I step on the sand than I observed that the beach was littered with thousands of small blue balloons. Fresh from New York, one naturally concluded that these balloons were adver-

[1] Since writing these lines I have discovered that chameleons take an unpardonably long time to change their colour.

tisements for something, so I bent down to see what was written on them. There was a fascination in the idea of an entire coast line littered with these blue baubles, even if the men who had sent them floating over the waves were animated by no higher purpose than selling beans. But as I examined the balloons, I found them to be devoid of any printing matter whatever, for they were not balloons at all. They were jellyfish.

I am beginning this chapter with chameleons and jellyfish for two very simple reasons. The first reason is because the chameleon and the jellyfish represent, to perfection, the male and female types of the most typical Palm Beachers. The women change their clothes, their husbands, and their opinions much more rapidly than the chameleon changes its colour. And the men – well, one need only stroll along the beach on a sunny morning to see them spread around, in red and shapeless masses, waiting for somebody to sting.

The second reason why I introduce the chameleon and the jellyfish is in order to create the atmosphere of the tropics without which it is impossible to understand Palm Beach.

When you read about Palm Beach in the average book of memoirs, when you see it portrayed in the movies, or satirized in the theatre, you receive only a blurred impression of sumptuous hotels, superbly dressed women, cocktail parties, bathing dresses, and cabarets. But unless you realize that all these things are set against a tropical background the whole affair becomes a meaningless orgy.

Stand with me on that beach on a clear day, and ignore for a moment the naked crowds about you. Look out to the horizon and you will see a purple streak. That is the Gulf Stream, swirling warm and mysterious from Mexico. Turn round and look inland. See the rows of coconut palms, and pink and scarlet profusion of hibiscus. Far away, beyond the town, there are forests in which the grey cranes are crying, and lakes covered with a brooding mist, and strange secret lilies thrusting out yellow, insolent tongues into the twilight.

And into this atmosphere there pours, every year, the richest, idlest crowd that the world has ever seen. Every individual of that crowd is nerve-racked from the end of the New York season, – in a mood to demand fiercer pleasures, to call for 'madder music and for stronger wine.' Now perhaps you will see what Palm Beach really is, and now, too, you may be prepared for some of the silhouettes which, with your permission, I shall endeavour to throw across the screen.

II

Dusk.

There is a raised platform, in the early, scented dusk, and on it two men are fighting bitterly. One is dark and hairy, the other is fair and smooth. Through the still air one can hear only the sound of the men's breathing, hoarse and desperate, the shuffle of their feet, and the thud of leather on naked flesh.

Then, suddenly, there is a roar of laughter, and one becomes aware of the crowd. The scene

broadens. The fight is taking place in the square, enclosed garden of the Oasis Club. It is a place dedicated, one would imagine, to more delicate usages. Over the white walls there drifts a purple motif of bouganvilla, and across the darkening sky is threaded a necklace of gold and purple lamps. A fountain plays a dispassionate, monotonous melody of silver.

The crowd responsible for the roar of laughter is no less exquisite than its surroundings. One sees row upon row of creamed and powdered faces, all slashed with the bright single line of vermilion which is our age's symbol for a mouth. The hats which sweep over those faces are the product of Maria Guy, and Chanel has evolved the creations which accompany them. As the women raise their hands to their faces, in a sudden horrified ecstasy of blood lust, a hundred emeralds wink green eyes through the shadows.

Thud, thud. A brutal left hook on the jaw. From the smooth one's mouth there trickles a thin line of crimson. He is staggering slightly. Will he fall? No, for a bell rings, and the fight is over. The men retire, and as they do so, there is a burst of music from the band, and a loud cackle of conversation from the crowd, like the cry of a flock of sea-gulls. Waiters hurry forward with trays of champagne, which is eagerly drained by the vermilion mouths, whose owners naturally need sustenance after so arduous an experience.

But these are only the preliminaries. The big fight is yet to come. The minutes are flying past, the sky is deepening to a rich violet, the melody of the

dance is faltering. Another bell. And instantly the crowd seats itself, with a scraping of chairs and a staccato gabble of talk, which is stilled as the new combatants appear in the ring.

See them, those combatants. One of them is in the Hogarth tradition, square, brutal, hideously male. The other, I feel, was born to dance to the music of Debussy, so slim is he, and so smiling, with a body of ivory and a fawn's eyes. Greedily do the women devour him. They sit back in the twilight like cats, gripping the slender stems of their champagne glasses with fingers that know no good.

The bell rings again. The boxers rise to their feet. The play has begun. Don't ask me to describe it. I really know nothing of left hooks or of body blows or of all the glorious symbolism of the noble art. All I know is that two simple males are exhibiting themselves before a great many complicated females. All I feel is that hundreds of hot, glittering eyes are riveted upon those bruised and honest limbs.

Thus it was, one imagines, in the decadence of Rome. In this manner did many weary and tragic women gaze and dream and lust, while the fools with the ivory limbs tore themselves to pieces before their idle eyes. And as I pause, and read again that rather beautiful passage which I have just written, it occurs to me that I catch in my prose the faint echo of the moralist. If that is so, I must beg your pardon. I did not intend to moralize. Only to catch a few of these colours on paper – and, perhaps, to make you shudder as I shuddered on that lovely night. For there is more to come.

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The naked figures dance spasmodically – suddenly stilled, suddenly alert. And then, there is a whirl of limbs, a flash of flying flesh, a cry – and the bruiser hurtles through the ropes. His thick, deadened body lands with a thud at the exquisite feet of one of Palm Beach's prettiest debutantes. She jumps up, lips parted, nostrils quivering. Is he dead? The crowd rises, gaping, eyes fixed on him as he lies there, out of the world. But after a few seconds they can see nothing, for a group of men have surrounded him, are bearing him away.

Instantly, the air is split with music. Drum and saxophone cry out for attention. Is it death? Then here is a dirge for your singing. Is it life? Then here is a melody to which you can dance. After only a few bars, the crowd returns to the normal. Three hundred pairs of eyes wander from the spot where their entertainer was lying, and meet their complements with an added fire. Three hundred pairs of arms are encircled, three hundred bodies sway together, under the gold and silver lights. And when the rumour drifts through the crowd that the man is not dead, that he has nothing more than a shattered eye and a broken arm, nobody pays very much attention, for after all, the only thing that matters is happening now – the touch of body to body, the drug of music, the utter abandon of the senses.

III

Morning Again.

I looked round the shabby, lovely room. The walls had a faded lustre that only age can give, and

the fabrics, though they were worn and tarnished, were of the stuff that dreams are made.

'How old is this house?' I asked.

'Exactly ten days,' snapped my hostess.

That sort of thing is always happening to one in Palm Beach. These villas have sprung up in a night, and a few years ago there was nothing but sand and waste. But it is impossible to remember that, because there is a universal conspiracy to forget it. A commodity is valued by its scarcity, and the scarcity of Age in America has sent its value soaring dizzily.

Enter a typical villa with me, and in the light of these remarks, study its composition. You will observe that the grass between the stones in the courtyard grows green and straight, because it was sown only a few weeks ago. Yet the stones themselves are worn smooth with centuries of footsteps, because they were imported wholesale from an old palace in Madrid. Inside, the house is apparently musty with age. One can hardly decipher the designs on the painted ceiling, because a horde of earnest decorators have scrabbled loud and long, last season, to remove them. The walls are cracking in all directions, not because of any architectural defect, but because the builder, who knew his business, saw to it that they *did* crack. The sofas are torn, not by the talons of Time, but by the scissors of a young person from New York, the dust of whose feet has hardly died away from the sun-baked highways. And all the furniture is worm-eaten by that particular sort of Worm which, as long as the interior decorating business continues to flourish, will never die.

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Can you not understand that in these surroundings it is a little difficult to get one's bearings? For the human beings themselves seem to absorb a certain degree of the unreality of their environment. I talk to a dowager, sweetly silvered with the seventies, and the grotesque thought suddenly strikes me that she is only nine months old and has been artificially puffed out, bleached and wrinkled by some new process of science. I see an aged negro walking across the lawn and I feel that he is made of papier mâché, that his back has been bent by machinery, and that his sombre patine of teak has been induced by the latest corporation of aniline dyes.

It all comes down to this – America has conquered Time. With a snap of her metallic fingers she has flicked the hands of the clock to any period of history which she has desired. Her surgeons have lifted thousands of ancient faces to the fresh skies of youth, her decorators have battered many a virgin forest into the wreckage of Age. The result is an exciting chaos. Which is not a bad description of the entire continent.

IV

Midnight.

A long stream of cars rolls incessantly up to a brilliantly lighted porch. Passing through that porch, and traversing numerous corridors, one arrives at the gambling-rooms. In one room they are playing roulette, in another hazard, in another baccarat. The stakes are high enough to make M. Emil Blanc hang his head with shame.

I do not mention the Casino merely to draw a picture of it. All Casinos are very much alike – they all abound in painted old women with puffy eyes and clawlike hands, they are all stuffy and over-heated, and, as far as I am concerned, they are all equally unprofitable. The only reason why I mention it is that gambling is strictly illegal throughout America.

Consider, for a moment, the utter contempt of the law which this implies. Every official in Florida knows about the Casino. Every clergyman knows. Every politician knows. There is not the faintest attempt at concealment – in fact, it is exceedingly well advertised, and occupies as prominent a position in Palm Beach as the Embassy Club in London. And yet nobody, – not even the driest, stuffiest killjoy, attempts to interfere with it. The paradox is so astounding that it is almost incomprehensible to the English mind. We will therefore leave it at that.

V

The last Afternoon.

I said that everything in Palm Beach had sprung up in a night. So also is it with the human affections. Here, love has a sudden birth, a momentary, crimson blossoming, a speedy death.

I lay on the beach in the sunlight, lazily regarding a very decorative young woman by my side. I thought that she was asleep, but she suddenly sat up with a start.

Young Woman: Gee! I had a shock. I thought I saw my husband.

Myself: Don't you want to see him?

Young Woman: No, I'm divorcing him.

Myself: Then he's hardly likely to be in Palm Beach.

Young Woman: Yes, he is. He doesn't know I'm divorcing him.

Myself: What will he do when he finds out?

Young Woman: He'll be mad at me, I guess.

Myself: Why are you divorcing him?

Young Woman: I forget. My lawyer has it written down somewhere.

Myself: Incompatibility?

Young Woman: M'yes.

Myself: I suppose that means that you like Booth Tarkington and he likes Upton Sinclair?

Young Woman (quite seriously): Well . . . that wouldn't be enough, really. My third husband – this one's the fourth – used to read Galsworthy till I had a pain in the neck. He was mean, too. He used to buy them in Paris, in the Tauchnitz edition, and smuggle them in. Still, I couldn't divorce him for that. So I became unfaithful to him.

Myself: I suppose if it had been anything but a Tauchnitz edition, you would have divorced him at once.

Young Woman: Now you're being sarcastic. (Brightly) Say – will you order me a drink?

We lay back, on the hot sand, sipping Bacardis. It was a perfect moment. In the distance a band was playing . . . '*Happiness, I guess, is just a memory, just a memory.*' Was it? I didn't care. The sun was beating down upon us, there was a cool breeze from the water, and the perpetual, drowsy hiss of waves break-

ing at our feet. All around was a riot of colour. The beach umbrellas were orange and green, the bathing cabins were sky-blue, the costumes of the bathers were like a chorus of the Russian ballet. Young men, burnt black, strolled by in crimson and yellow. Young women fluttered along with a whirl of coloured handkerchiefs and flying silks. They looked like gods, so slim were they, so supple and so straight.

There is nothing in the world so beautiful as the youth of America. It is a beauty all the more intense because it is careless and unthinking. God is so obviously in His star-spangled heaven, and all is so obviously right with the New World, that when one is young, over here, one can afford to breathe, and to love and to laugh, without knowing why one laughs.

The hours went by. We dressed, and drove to the Everglades Club for tea. We danced in the open air, while the shadows lengthened. Little green and purple lanterns began to sparkle in the palm trees.

It was all exactly like a musical comedy. I had a feeling that at any moment all the girls would join hands and kick up their legs, while the *jeune premier* waltzed down the steps. Even the comic relief is here. Regard Mrs. Y, who drifts before our eyes. Mrs. Y has come to Palm Beach accompanied by

1. Forty servants
2. Eight detectives
3. One of the largest diamonds in the world.

'It's her social position she's thinking about,' said my companion.

'Does she need eight detectives to find it?'

'No. They're for the diamond. And the children.'

'Heavens! Has she lost her children?'

'No. But one of the detectives is a boxing professional, another is a tennis professional, another a golf professional, and so on. They teach the children in their spare time.'

'I shall write to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.'

'She's probably one of its largest contributors.'

'Then I shall expose her. I shall spread a rumour that she hasn't got forty servants at all. I shall say that she has only thirty-two, and that she gives the footmen false moustaches. What would happen to her social position then?'

Seriously, the thing worried me. Supposing five of Mrs. Y's housemaids were suddenly blown over the edge of a cliff, would Mrs. Y's social position fall with them? Supposing all the footmen fell dead at dinner, poisoned by the cocktails, would the guests rise with a fatigued smile, and leave the house? It was very mysterious. I studied the dancing figure of Mrs. Y to see if I could find a clue.

She appeared to be very bored, and was constantly looking up to the sky. Since it was obviously not going to rain, I wondered if she had a detective watching from a balloon. But no. The sky was clear. Then perhaps there were some detectives concealed in the palm trees. However I could not see any. Where could they be? I began to feel very sorry for those detectives. I longed for them to have something to detect.

I said to my companion, 'I am going to go up to Mrs. Y and say "boo!" in a very loud voice. That

will give the detectives something to do. They will all leap upon me. One of them will jump out of the big drum (which has been playing flat all the evening), one will slide down a palm tree, another . . .'

But my companion had gone.

Still the hours fly by, still we dance. It is almost dark now, and the floor is lit by ribbons of coloured lights from the palm trees. The terrace is flooded with an artificial moonlight which makes the real moon withered and stingy. There is a shrill chattering of crickets from the formal gardens.

I have a new companion – far lovelier than the girl of the afternoon. She is quiet and grave, with the pale, childish face of a primitive Madonna. She is dressed in white, and for several minutes she has been silent. Suddenly, with a nervous gesture, she puts her hand to her face.

She: Oh! I had a shock. I thought I saw my husband.

Myself: Don't you want to see him?

She: No. I'm divorcing him.

Myself: Then he's hardly likely to be in Palm Beach.

She: Yes, he is. He doesn't know I'm divorcing him.

Myself: What will he do when he finds out?

She: He'll be mad at me, I guess.

It was uncanny. The conversation of the morning was repeating itself, word by word. But in how different an accent! There was nothing flippant about this new companion. There was pain in her

voice and pain in her eyes. She seemed to be drooping with an intense fatigue.

As though the words were being forced from my lips I said:

Myself: Why are you divorcing him?

She: I had an hunting accident.

I looked at her. Her head was bent very low.

Myself: I don't understand.

She: I can't have any children.

Myself: Oh – God!

Through the crazy, drunken melodies I listened to her tale. Her husband worshipped children. They had only just been married when she was thrown from her horse. Three days ago, in New York, the doctors had told her that she would never bear a child. Quietly, she packed her things, and came down here. She had spent the morning with a lawyer. She loved her husband with all her heart.

Women of America, I salute you.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Three Women

'WOMEN of America, I salute you!' Like most rhetoric it was the expression of a mood, rather than the result of consideration. Even if it were possible to 'salute' (whatever that may mean) the entire female population of America, I should not wish to do so. But while we are at Palm Beach, surrounded by women of every species, we might well pause in these warm airs to see whether there are any generalizations which we may make about the women of America as a whole.

There are. It was at about this time that I discovered that there were three distinct ages of American women. And at the risk of causing a roar of execration, I propose to tell you what they are.

I. A Bore.

The first age, that of the debutante, is when the American woman is a bore. She is conceited, flamboyant and dull, for the simple reason that she is subjected, during her first season, to a lifetime of artificial admiration, concentrated into the short space of a few months.

Because she bears the magic title 'debutante,' everything that she does must be right. She is like a tiresome child on its birthday treat. Even if she has been the ugly sister of the family, even if she had hitherto aroused neither passion nor envy, the simple fact that she is making her debut invests her with a halo of romance. The halo is manufactured exclu-

sively by feminine hands – young and old – and its secret is jealously guarded by massed battalions of American females. For they realize the supreme importance of entering the stage to a dazzle of lights and a fanfare of trumpets, in order that they may capture their prey before it has had time to blink itself into sanity or to listen to the voice of Reason.

If anybody can prove me wrong, I am open to conviction. But a brief review of the evidence offers, to an undazzled male, no alternative conclusion. Watch a debutante at her coming-out party. For her little hour she is a queen. Her picture has adorned the lighter pages of the local newspapers. Her beauty has been extolled by the local gossip-spinners. Her name has been linked with this one, and with that one. And now she is standing, dressed in white, agreeably virginal, receiving the entire male population which can be included under the dreary name of 'Society.' There is a bank of roses at her back, a bouquet of white orchids in her hand, a smile on her lips. She is the cynosure of every eye.

How many girls are annually born into the United States who can possibly keep a level head in such circumstances? Not one. Even if the debutante is an only child, accustomed to being spoilt, she is made dizzy by this mass adulation. If she is a member of a family, accustomed to being snubbed, she becomes positively drunk. And during that drunkenness she is insolent, tyrannical, and above all, a bore.

I was occasionally lured, by over-persuasive friends, to debutante parties in New York, Chicago, and elsewhere, and I shall always number them

among the greater trials of my life. One had to dance with the debutante, out of mere politeness, and it was far more difficult to dance with her than with a princess. And while one danced, one was given to understand that a supreme favour was being bestowed, that one was the most envied of mortals. If they only knew how grimly one's mind was fixed on the little ticket in one's pocket that would soon entitle one to a hat, a coat, and freedom!

The spoiling of the debutante is not confined to the men. The women eagerly join in it. The mothers of other girls, not yet out, are the most eager enthusiasts of all. They stand in the doorway, fingering their pearls, and as they look around the room they see hundreds of young men under an influence of mass hypnotism. They see one girl, the girl of the moment, invested with a glamour which she does not really possess. They see hundreds of masculine eyes dazzled by that glamour. And they say to themselves: 'This is good. This is superb. It is just this extra excitement which is needed to give my Mary or my Jane her proper send-off. Some man is bound to fall for her if I can only afford enough champagne, enough frocks, and enough noise.'

Nor is the spoiling of the debutante confined to a single party, or a single week. It lasts throughout an entire season. Every day the postman knocks at the door bearing something which somebody has said in flowers. Her dressing-table is stocked with enough perfumes to make the ladies of the Follies Bergères swoon in ecstasy for years. The mantelpiece is thick with invitations to this, that and the other.

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And she herself – the ex-schoolgirl, comparatively secluded, even in this cocktail age, from excitements – she takes it all at its face value. She says to herself: 'All these years I have been hidden away – and now, I have only to show myself, for the world to acclaim me! I had only to throw away the veil to be recognized as beautiful, only to open my mouth to be hailed as a wit!' Little does she realize that her triumph is not her own, but is the triumph of a symbol, a gigantic, fake idol erected by millions of women who are intent upon quick returns.

If you will forgive me for saying so, I venture to think that we manage these things better in England. Our girls come out, but they come out a little less sensationally. We do not make this sharp division between complete obscurity and dazzling limelight. Our debutantes have usually stretched a slender ankle into the public view before they appear in their entirety. And then, the light which shines upon them is mellower, less brilliant, as becomes a more ancient civilization. Moreover, we are blessed, in England, with a considerable surplus of women, so that the average English girl is forced to behave herself unless she wishes to alienate any masculine affection which comes her way.

The net result of the American system is a series of young, loud, tiresome bores. And in case my meaning, through the innate politeness of my phraseology, remains somewhat obscure, I shall be glad to amplify it by private correspondence, upon the receipt of a trifling fee of five hundred dollars.

II. A Delight.

And now, the chrysalis of the debutante dissolves, fades away, and the butterfly emerges. My simile is not entirely adequate, for though the American woman of twenty-five and onwards is bright and radiant, she is by no means a mere butterfly.

Why this startling change? For startling it is. I can remember, when I was in America about five years ago, meeting debutantes who set my teeth on edge by their loud voices, asphyxiated my intelligence with their silly chatter, and maddened me by their self-complacency. Many of those girls, in the short space of five years, have grown into charming young women. They have ceased to shout, they have actually read a few books, and they no longer regard themselves as the centre of the universe. What is the explanation of this mystery?

The explanation is to be found in the fact that the American husband is like a soldier who is admirable in assault but is unable to conduct a lengthy siege. During the first year or two of marriage he is wearisomely adoring. Nothing can be too good for his wife. And then, he cools off with unexampled rapidity. He takes his eyes off his wife and fixes them on his office. He takes his intelligence back into his own hands and moulds it to the service of his career. And very often, he takes his hat off the rack and hangs it, at unconventional hours, in some other woman's hall.

I am generalizing from what I have seen. No man can do more. But I assure you that I have seen

enough. Not long ago, in a big decorating store, I ran across a man who had been married for two years. During those two years he had been under the usual matrimonial eclipse. In his case it had been a total eclipse, for he was a man of taste, and he had cheerfully submitted to the ordeal of living in one of the ugliest apartments in New York, decorated by his wife. He said to me: 'I woke up last week. I felt that if I lived another month among all those purple cushions in that damnable apartment of ours, I should go mad.'

As I left him he was stroking with loving fingers a length of old Italian peach-coloured brocatelle. I saw him, a few months later, in a very quiet 'speakeasy' at midnight. He was again stroking a length of cloth, but this time, it was not old, and it was attached to the shoulders of a peach-coloured lady.

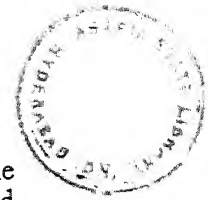
I do not claim that I am meeting every side of the case. I only claim that I am meeting the average case. And the evidence is based on the confession of the young married women themselves. Why are American women so keen on confessions? Is it the result of all the True Story Magazines? Or does the steam heat go to their heads? In any case, confess they do, and whether you want to listen or not, you are forced to do so.

I am getting as quickly as I can to my analysis of the second age of American women – the age when they are a delight – but I must preface that analysis by one of the aforementioned confessions. The other day a charming woman of twenty-six began to tell me the story of her life. I tried to stop her – believe me

or believe me not – but it was impossible. 'You look so sympathetic,' she said. I assured her that my tailor, and not my Creator, was responsible for that illusion. My assurance had little effect. Perhaps it was just as well, for she told me some interesting things. She began by saying, 'I have a typical American husband. Now you, brought up on European ideals, don't understand what that means. We took the institution of marriage from Europe but we have turned it into something entirely different. If we copied it exactly it would look as out of place over here as a Charles II room looks when it is bodily transported into a New York apartment house.

'Most European husbands – speaking very broadly – never entirely cease to be lovers. During three-quarters of their married lives, it may be all a pretence, but they keep up that pretence. Why, I don't quite know. Perhaps it's merely a question of centuries of training in good manners. Perhaps it's merely the domestic application of that sort of politeness which makes some American girls feel that they have been mistaken for princesses when they come in contact with the courtesy of a typical Londoner, or when their hands are kissed in Paris.

'But the American husband – God bless him – doesn't understand that sort of thing. To him it is all "bunk." He worships Frankness – sometimes I think he makes a fetish of it – and when a thing is no longer there he has no patience to pretend that it is. He is perfectly aware that after a few years, the first passionate love of early marriage is bound to die. And when it is dead, he is for having done with it



altogether. His wife ceases to be his mistress. She becomes just his wife, the mother of his children, and the keeper of his home. And as for him – he gets back to work.

'To a cultured European, a wife is always, even if only in spirit, his mistress. Why? Don't ask me. I can only assume, as I said before, that it is a question of manners. Yes, it *must* be manners. For I remember staying at an old country house in England, where I knew my host was bored to tears by his wife. But he offered her the courtesy he would offer to a queen. It was all mechanical, but it was very pretty.'

The confession was almost at an end. 'What I want you to realize,' she said, ' is the effect that this has upon young American women who have been married for a few years.'

'What effect does it have?' I asked.

'Look around you,' she said.

I looked around me. It was at a private dance, and there were many women there who were in the same position as my confidante. And in the light of this recent revelation it seemed to me that all their eyes were hungry, and all their arms straining for something that perpetually eluded them.

'They look as though they were searching for something.'

She laughed triumphantly. 'You're right. We all are. It isn't just a question of sex. Sex enters into it, of course, but the main cause of our state of mind is the fact that all of us, after a year or two of adoration, have been suddenly left high and dry. We haven't even been let down gently. One night we were

princesses – the next night we weren't even *there*. Our husbands don't mean to be unkind. They are still devoted to us. Most of them will spend the rest of their lives working for us. But that isn't what we want. A flame has died and we want, so desperately, to rekindle it.'

'And you do?'

'Yes.' She paused for a moment. 'At other altars.' Then, as though correcting herself – 'I don't want you to misunderstand. I don't want you to think that we are just a horde of sex-mad women. All we want is a little romance – a little chivalry. And I have known women who hunger so for this that they have given themselves, body and soul, to the first man who offered it.'

She rose to her feet and smiled. 'So next time a young married woman makes herself particularly delightful to you, my friend, don't flatter yourself that it is entirely due to your overwhelming charm.'

'*Makes herself particularly delightful*' – yes, that was the phrase for which I had been searching. It told me so much. It told me of thousands of quiet rooms where women, still young, were sitting neglected. It told me of mirrors which reflected discontented faces, faces that had been worshipped for a year or two and then – forgotten. It told me of a myriad resolutions, made by these women, that before it was too late they would recapture some of the glamour that had rested on them, only to pass away. It told me of their fierce desire to go out again into the market-place of men – to arouse delight, by fair means or foul.

And they succeed. The disillusioned young woman in America *is* a delight. She is incomparably superior to her younger sister. Gone is the clumsy arrogance of the debutante – vanished, long vanished, the days when she regarded mere youth and femininity as permanently irresistible attractions. For ever departed are the liquid April twilights when silence was enough – when 'he' must do all the talking, when 'he' must perform all the ritual of worship – when, in fact, a succession of 'he's' must prostrate themselves before her feet in the dusk. For dusk it was – a mysterious dusk that women have created for their own glorification.

Everything is different now. She ponders, she studies. She is wise, in the art of flattery, learned in the lore of reticence. Consider a few homely illustrations. Have you ever, for instance, watched an American woman of thirty make up? At the risk of giving rise to misunderstandings, I will confess that I have. And I can assure you that it is a far more admirable process than the slapdash methods of the debutante. The debutante daubs a white patch on her nose, slashes a red line across her mouth, pats her hair, and arises with the conviction that she is perfect. Her elder sister has learned a better game. She realizes the poetry of cosmetics. There are no daubs. Instead, a quiet and exquisite application of powder, applied as delicately as the bloom on a painting by Renoir. There are no slashes. No, *sir*. There is only a faint, lingering tracery of vermilion, applied to lips which have forgotten more lies than the debutante ever had the ingenuity to invent.

She has become intelligent. Bitter experience has taught her that it takes two to make a party. Granted that the first passages of love are played on a masculine note – a note that by its vibrant virility almost drowns the accompaniment of feminine surrender – granted all that – she yet realizes that life, if its energies are distributed in such proportions, is apt to be a little exhausting, for both man and woman. In a word, she has learned her part of the immortal dialogue, she knows her entrances, and (vital point) her exits, she is a fitting partner for a duet.

When I dine with such a woman, I experience a pleasure more subtle than I experience in London, or Paris, or any of the rest of them. I don't have to do all the choosing. I don't have to tire my voice by reading the entire menu, because she knows, quite firmly, that she wants caviare, and a sole Colbert, and some salad. A debutante knows about as much about food as Mayor Thompson knows about King George.

Have I made myself quite clear? It is merely the difference between the raw product and the finished article. 'Pay yer money and take yer choice!' Why any man hesitates in his choice, it is beyond my ability to comprehend.

III. A Tragedy.

Five hundred faces, grimly watching me. Five hundred faces, tired – oh, so tired! Five hundred faces, that nobody wants to see, that nobody wants to love. Five hundred faces of women who are dead.

I beg your pardon. I am writing on a February afternoon, and the fading light has apparently cast

across my page a corresponding gloom. I have no right so to characterize the audiences in the Women's Clubs. And as I think of certain seances in New York, Chicago, in Boston, in small towns, too, I ask myself if I have any right to make the observation at all. But there are other places, many of them. There are other Women's Clubs – I had almost written 'mausoleums' – in which the tragi-comedy of Sex is playing itself out. And it is of those clubs, and their inmates, that I would write.

Consider, for a moment, the type which I have in mind. Look her in the eyes. What do you see? You see the debutante of long ago – the girl who has had her fling – so tragically brief. You see her moving, with insolent grace, through a crowd of young men, and you see a sudden pause, as she picks the particular young man of her choice. And then you see a flame which burns quickly – so horribly quickly – the flame of married love. And after that, there are many colours, many swift silhouettes, many purple passages. But eventually, far too soon, the brightness dies, and the colours merge into a single veil of grey – dull and dead.

It is my conviction that millions of middle-aged American women are being stunted and starved because their husbands, never having learned to be lovers, concentrate their whole lives, after the first years of passion, on business, and assume it their natural privilege to possess a mistress.

Whenever one says anything so obviously true as this, one invariably arouses a storm of protest. I once wrote an innocent article pointing out the self-evident

fact that a bachelor is more capable of running a house, comfortably and efficiently, than any woman yet born. The instant that article was published, hundreds of women all over England and America rushed to their inkpots (which, like most feminine inkpots, appeared to be too full) and wrote to denounce me. I was accused of every base and criminal tendency.

If such a mild article produced so fierce an outcry, what will be the result of *these* observations? I hardly dare to think. Yet, nothing will persuade me that the third stage of American marriage, for countless armies of middle-aged women, is other than a tragedy.

Why, the thing cries to the heavens! You can see it in every city, large and small, in this vast continent. Why is it that America is the only civilized country in the world where women of a certain age band together so hopelessly, organize a myriad 'movement,' march in crusades, live in clubs, arrange banquets, join societies, with such feverish energy?

You could not lure the average British woman into a woman's club, even if you paid her a bonus. You could no more persuade a group of average French women to lunch together than you could persuade them to jump into the Seine. And in the other European countries most of the women would regard the prospect of being forced to spend hours of discussion and debate, with their own sex, not only as boring, but as immoral.

They would say 'my place is in the home.' And as

they said it, they would unconsciously stab a million American women, dwelling in comfortable apartments, with apparently full and useful lives, with prosperous and apparently devoted husbands, to the heart.

Don't you *see*? Don't you hear the wail of discontent that echoes as a perpetual undercurrent to the older American woman's song of triumph? It takes courage to write these words. I can see the tragic, menacing faces of thousands of women, who have steeled themselves to apparent indifference, who have hypnotized themselves into a belief that their clubs are such a comfort, and that the Women Crusaders For World Peace, Blankville Brands, are of vital importance to the march of progress. I can see them all, and I can hear their shout of denial when I tell them that they are cheating themselves. Why, you may ask, should I disillusion them? Isn't it rather cruel? Yes, it is. But one has to be cruel to be kind, and I, for one, think that the supreme cruelties are self-inflicted.

Let me tell you a story. It happened at one of my lectures. I would not tell it to you, even under the cloak of anonymity, were it not for the fact that the woman of whom I write – she was about fifty years old – died the other day. She was one of the leaders in the small social world of her town. Her husband was the richest and the most successful man in his district. Their marriage, thirty years before, had been for her a love match, for him a matter of convenience. Another woman appeared on the scene within a few months of the marriage. There were never any children.

And so – what did she do? She aged fifteen years in a night. She threw herself into good works. Desperately she interested herself in movements, in crusades, in the countless societies which lie, waiting to be brought to life by similar women. She was the leader of her club. She attended every lecture. She attended *my* lecture.

I saw her in the audience. Beneath the staid, set exterior one had a sense of something imprisoned – some spirit that was trying to escape. It was a spirit which she shared with many other women there, but in her it seemed to vibrate with particular force.

She came up to me afterwards. She said not a word about the subject of my talk. She asked me no questions. She looked at me with fierce tortured eyes. She said: 'I wish I had a son like you.' And then she walked out, through the comfortable, efficient rooms where she had spent half her life.

I am not handing myself bouquets. She would have said the same, at that moment, to any fairly young man. Apart from her esteemed and distant husband, her life was spent entirely among women. Perhaps some word that I had said had reminded her of the day when things were different. I can't explain it, and I don't want to. If anybody is foolish enough to misinterpret my motive in telling this story, I care not at all. I am not writing for fools.

Multiply that woman by several millions and you have one of America's deepest problems. For it *is* a problem. Neglect has dictated these women's lives – a neglect born of the unnatural speed of American life – swift wooing, swift passion, swift oblivion – a

year or two of extreme servility on the part of the husband, followed by a sudden awakening, and a life spent in a wild scramble for wealth. Out of that neglect have come many strange and powerful forces, all of them springing primarily from starved impulses of sex, yet so distorted that no man can tell where they will lead. They have led to innumerable female societies and organizations which would vanish, like a puff of smoke, if the American husband called his wife home. But the American husband doesn't. And as long as he doesn't he must expect these armies of women to concoct new 'ideals,' new 'prohibitions,' new bans, new codes of morality, even – new wars.

What is the answer to be? Don't ask me. And please don't write to find out. You might hear something that it would be better for you not to know.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

A Small White Room

Let us leave this somewhat fœtid atmosphere of sex analysis and go out into the sunshine. It is the month of March – that month when England is alternately stifled by fog, swamped by rain, and frozen fast with frost. But these things are far away. We are bound still further south.

After a few hours' voyage over a sea of trembling purple we came to Havana – a city of ancient, naked beauty.

But I do not wish to write of Havana's worn and sun-baked streets, nor of the coloured sparks which glint from hundreds of bottles crowding the shelves of the open saloons, nor of the pale green moon which nightly turns the city into a madman's paradise. After seeing what I saw, these delights meant little or nothing to me.

What I saw was a small white room.

Now Havana, as the capital of Cuba, is under the guardianship of the American Government, and I would call the attention of the Government to the horrors constantly enacted in that small white room. It is America's job. America gave Cuba its independence. America is giving Cuba its prosperity. What America says in Cuba 'goes.' It is time that somebody said something about that little room.

It is a room where men are choked to death. Not quickly and mercifully, but slowly, with unspeakable agonies. The choking is done in the name of justice,

for the room is the death-chamber of the principal prison in the State.

I cannot make you feel about it as I feel unless I explain the circumstances in which I visited the prison. The visit took place at the end of a perfect day. I must recall that day in order to explain its climax.

I had begun by exploring the city. During that exploration I felt, for the first time in my life, something of the thrill which comes to the American tourist during his first contact with antiquity. I knew the delight in age for age's sake. We in England, who are brought up among ancient things, are inclined to become dense to the quality which is peculiar to age. We study an Elizabethan house, for instance, merely as a design. It is either a good design or a bad design – that is all. But when one has been away from England for some time, the sudden discovery of an antique city seems to awaken a sixth æsthetic sense. We see that age itself has a beauty, apart altogether from the design in which it is expressed.

And so, as I walked through those narrow streets, with their mouldering walls, their exquisite iron traceries, their tiny sidewalks, along which the cats were stalking with superb grace, there seemed to sound from every corner a remembered tune. I was walking back into real life. No longer was I troubled by that sensation, so frequent in America, that I was in a mimic city, that life was, with terrifying truth, a stage, that the scenery might at any moment be shifted from behind me. No – here in Havana things

were far more deeply rooted. The houses had stood for centuries – the storms of years had beaten round them, a thousand suns had burned them white.

So it was with the people. They were real people – they were not only presidents of corporations, wives of presidents of corporations, stenographers of presidents of corporations. They were just people – loving life and hating it, drinking and dying and being born again. Their voices rang more true, their smiles flashed more vividly, there was a depth of mystery in their eyes.

I talked to several cats – in Spanish, of course. Only fools imagine that one can talk to cats in any language. I once took a grey Persian, which had been brought up in Oxford, to Paris, and it was quite incapable of making itself understood. I used to watch it on the garden wall, as it endeavoured to start a conversation with its new Parisian friends, and they merely shrugged their shoulders, passing by with a whisk of their tails. It could not have been because of any lack of *chic* on the part of my Persian, who was the most elegant cat you ever saw.

Then, we lunched, and went to the races. I am very fond of races. I think that they would be better without the horses, but one cannot expect perfection. The crowd compensates for everything. This crowd was superb. It was replete with monsters. One saw men so fat that one felt they were doing it on purpose. One saw dwarfs hobbling along, talking in high-pitched voices. One saw lunatics, flicking their fingers in the air and putting out their tongues at the passers-by.

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Perched at intervals along the benches were brightly tinted cocottes. They were the old-fashioned type of cocotte about whom one used to write tearful poems in one's schooldays. They were blowsy and pathetic, with metallic hair and hectic cheeks. They seemed to be so evenly distributed among the crowd – one cocotte to ten men – that for a moment I had a wild idea that the Cuban authorities, with Latin logic, had worked out a system of supply and demand, and had admitted just that number and no more. However, I expect that idea originated in my own nasty mind.

Then, after the races, we bathed. I know of no other word for that exquisitely sensuous performance. There was a quality of music in the water. One swam through a treble of crystal, into a middle register of topaz, and ended by a plunge into the purple deeps. If you don't like the metaphor I do. It reminds me of something I would not readily forget.

But there is one thing that I would give a great deal to forget.

I was motoring home alone. Suddenly, I found myself in a large open square, filled with people. I asked my driver why the people were gathered there.

'It is the prison, señor,' he said. 'They visit to-day.'

'Couldn't I visit too?'

'If you are acquainted with any of the prisoners, señor.'

I rapidly reviewed in my mind those of my acquaintances who were likely to be, at the moment, immured in a Cuban prison. But so greatly had my

social position improved during the last six months that I could think of only one. And he, I knew, was in Wormwood Scrubs.

So I said to the driver: 'Lend me five dollars.'

'Certainly, señor.'

With which, I passed into the prison.

As soon as I entered, accompanied by a small suite of officers and attendants, a remarkable sight met my eyes. The outer court was crowded with friends and relatives of prisoners – many of them coloured – stretching their arms through the bars. These friends and relatives, not enjoying the acquaintance of chauffeurs who would lend them five dollars, were not allowed to pass inside. And so, they had to convey what pathetic comfort they could through iron bars.

I saw couples, holding hands, standing very still, looking into each other's eyes. I saw a little old woman, her face grotesquely twisted with grief, frenziedly stroking the sleeve of her young son, who stood sulkily there, his eyes fixed on a girl who was chattering nearby. I saw a coloured woman beating the bars, calling out terrible things in *patois*. I saw a young couple, pale as death, their eyes closed, their lips pressed to the same bar, from opposite sides.

I began to feel possessed by a mood very different from that of a few moments before. Captivity of any sort is hateful. Here was captivity exhibited in its starkest form.

We passed inside. A reek of rancid fat blew across the square. It came from four immense cauldrons where they were cooking the men's supper. We

walked through a crowd of men – all of them prisoners. I regarded them furtively, trying to see if they had any distinguishing characteristics of crime. I saw none. Perhaps it was foolish to expect any. But surely it was not foolish to feel a surge of pity for men who seemed as clean, as kind, as human as any of one's friends?

I began to wonder why I had come. Everybody was staring at us. It was a relief when we entered the precincts reserved for the worst offenders, and climbed some stairs, out of sight of the caged animals of the courtyard.

But there were more animals to see. A great hall stretched before us. There must have been at least three hundred men in it. They were posed in every possible attitude of dejection. Some of them were walking round in circles, very quickly and spasmodically, their eyes fixed on the floor. Others lay face downwards on the floor. Others stood with their heads to the wall. One thing they all had in common – they avoided looking one in the eyes.

I felt bitterly ashamed – not because they were prisoners, but because I was not. What conceivable right had I to walk through them so callously, to pass by with a glance of pity, to go out again into the sunlight? Why were they caged, while I was free? What had they done, that I might not also do?

'How long are these men in for?' I asked.

'Anything from fifteen days to fifteen years.'

We were now in a narrow, darkened corridor. Dimly, on a placard, I saw the word 'Incorrigible.' I looked through a hole in the wall and saw a tiny

passage, containing six doors. It was all very dark.

'What goes on in there?' I said. I hardly wanted to know the answer, but I had to ask.

'Rough customers.'

'What – what do they have to do?'

'Sit in the dark.'

'Alone?'

'Of course.' He looked at me as though he thought me a fool. 'Twenty-four hours, sometimes. Sometimes a week.' He chuckled. 'They're tame enough after that.'

He swung to the right. 'Executioner's Room,' he said, and pointed to a door opposite. 'Like to see it?'

I nodded. It seemed to me that a chill wind was blowing down the corridor.

He swung open a door, and motioned me in. I entered.

I saw a small white room. So dazzled was I by the sunlight outside that for a moment I thought the room to be empty. Then, gradually, in the centre, the thing took shape, out of the gloom.

It was a chair, standing on a dais raised about a foot from the ground. At first it seemed a perfectly innocent chair. Then, little by little, I noticed its horrible accoutrements.

At the base were two clasps of steel. Those clasps had bitten into the legs of countless tortured men. Round the arms were two thick straps, to be fastened over the heart that was soon to beat its last. And at the top . . . that was the most fearful thing of all.

I thought that it was an electrocution chair. That

was my sweet illusion. I saw a little steel knob, placed to press into the back of the skull. I saw a heavy steel crank behind. But I saw no wires.

The executioner turned the crank. Involuntarily I stepped back. I felt idiotically alarmed. I asked, 'You're sure the current's off?'

He grinned. 'There ain't any current to this machine.'

'Then . . . What?'

For answer he put his thick grimy fingers to his throat. 'This is a throttling machine,' he said.

I stared at him, feeling as though I should be sick. Through a buzzing in my ears I heard his explanation . . .

'Quarter of an hour, it may take. Sometimes twenty minutes. You see, men vary. Sometimes that little knob catches 'em just at the top of the spine, and breaks their neck, and then it's all over quick. But there are others who ain't so lucky. Spines won't break. They go on breathing. Tough thing, a man's neck, when you come to think of it.'

I got to the door. A blaze of sunlight shone into the room, licking round the hideous thing like a flame. Still the voices pursued me, louder, for fear I should not hear . . .

'There's a man waiting now, upstairs. He's for it next month. Would you like to have a look at him?'

I was outside again. A batch of prisoners looked at me curiously. I ran to the entrance, and pushed past the guard. I wanted to die.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Extremities

And now for many days we journeyed towards the western coast, and my determination to write nothing about the 'Vastness of the Continent' was put to a severe test. Through dark forests we roared, and over mountains of pastel blue, along enchanted valleys, and by rivers that laughed at us as we passed. Town succeeded town, day drifted imperceptibly into night. And as the darkness came, I would lie back in my room, and listen to the melancholy tolling of the engine bell as we slowly trundled through some distant station.

Sometimes the spirit of a whole country is echoed in a single sound. I have only to hear the cawing of rooks, as they wheel over bare trees against a winter sky, and all England seems to stretch before me – the quiet fields at dusk, the great white roads over the downs, the eternal swell of waves beneath ancient cliffs. I have only to hear a magpie to be in Australia again, tramping over barren hills, the pitiless sun burning on my face. All Paris dances to the sound of those thin high motor-horns – I can see the chestnuts flowering in the Bois, the tables perched along the Boulevards, the ceaseless merry-go-round of the Place de la Concorde. Cockney London is in the cry of a newspaper boy, Venice in the oh-hé of a gondolier, Greece in a nightingale's plaint . . .

And all America in the tolling of that bell. There is nothing like it. In many strange cities have I heard it, during many lonely hours. It always filled

me with a spirit of adventure – I felt that this train was pressing forward into lands unknown, like a pioneer, warning all who might try to hinder it, braving whatever might come its way. It was not meant to be beautiful, yet often it had a ringing beauty. That, in itself, is typical of a continent which is filled with so many things which are beautiful, as it were, by accident, like the skyscraper, or the great steel cranes that stretch out their arms to you at the entrance to Chicago.

Then, at length, we passed across the desert. People had spoken slightingly to me about the desert. The desert, they declared, was a bore. The desert, they asserted, got into one's soup. The only thing to do about the desert, they maintained, was to ignore it.

Ignore it? The desert made me drunk with beauty. I would stand on the observation car, staring at its bleak, wrinkled bosom, fascinated by its immense and timeless sterility. As the sun went down, the desert took on a hectic flush. Against a lavender sky the gaunt cactus trees stood out like sentinels in some regiment of the damned. Black and still, in lines which stretched to infinite distances, those cactuses guarded the treasure of the desert, which was dust. It was a superbly theatrical prelude to the most theatrical city in the entire world. It gives one a feeling of descending into hell. And that, of course, is the feeling which ought to have possessed me. For we were nearing Hollywood.

* * *

I looked out of the window of my sleeping-car. It was five o'clock in the afternoon, so perhaps the orgies might not have begun. However, as I had heard in song and in story that the orgies of Hollywood were perpetual, I had a hope of seeing some chorus girl pass by the window, rattling a hypodermic syringe as she walked. But nobody passed, and all I heard was a thrush, singing in the English mode, perched on a spray of orange-blossom.

I arose, and drove to the hotel. On the way, I peered eagerly about for signs of the debauchery which, as we all know, has Los Angeles in its grip. I expected to see parties of bloated millionaires reeling arm-in-arm down the highways, stamped with the signs of nameless sins. I anticipated flaming women, reclining shamelessly in vast limousines, gnawing their pearls, sometimes even swallowing them, with ceaseless desire. I had promised myself that the air would be split, from time to time, with shots and screams. All I saw was a very orderly city, bathed in dazzling sunshine, filled with people walking primly down the sidewalks. Something, evidently, was amiss.

At the hotel I inquired of my bell-boy, whose appearance was depressingly cherubic, if the city were lying low in fear of a police-raid. He did not seem to understand. And so I went outside again, intent on driving round the city.

No sooner had I stepped on to the path, than a shrill scream rang through the air. Instantly a feeling of exaltation possessed me. So after all, it was true! Some woman was evidently being done to death, in the most obliging manner, within a few

minutes of my arrival. I turned sharply round, looked up at the window, and saw Mr. John Barrymore's monkey. It gibbered at me, spat, turned its shameless back with a gesture of derision, and disappeared.

Cursing Mr. Barrymore for so falsely arousing my hopes, I stepped into the car. We were still in Los Angeles, and I wanted to drive to Hollywood. It sounds easier than it is. Los Angeles covers an area of over one hundred square miles. The movie colony is scattered indiscriminately over that area. After I had been driving at full tilt for over half an hour, I came to the conclusion that vice, however flagrant, must be spread somewhat thin in this city.

But where was it – this vice? I studied the houses that flashed by. How could anybody be immoral in such houses? They basked in the late sunlight, pink and green and tiny. There were rows and rows of them, stretching for miles from the mountains to the sea. They were naïve and unsophisticated, they had amusing roofs of coral, and their windows were painted a bright sea-blue. The gables were flirtatious in jade and yellow, and the chimneys poked impudent painted heads to the eternally brilliant sky. They were houses which might have been lifted straight from the fairy tales of Hans Andersen. One felt that their door-knockers were made of barley-sugar, and that if one were to break off a piece of the roof, it could be eaten as an acid-drop.

How *could* people be immoral in them? I found out, later on, that it was quite impossible. There is only one thing to be done as soon as one has passed

through those infantile doors, and that is to say: 'Ba, ba, black sheep, Have you any wool?' Any more exotic ballad would be entirely out of place. If I had any evil thoughts – (and, as my vast public knows, I am full of them) – they would be entirely dissipated by the atmosphere of these Hollywood homes. I entered many of them and I found myself instantly transported to my second childhood. I pouted. I jumped about. For two cents I would have played at pirates.

Even more discouraging is this question of distance.

Distance may lend enchantment to the view, but it is terribly bad for vice. Imagine, for example, that I am preparing to be exceedingly wicked. It is seven o'clock. I stand in front of the glass, tying my bow with trembling fingers. My face is flushed. I bite my lips. Maybe I pant a little. Yes, certainly I would pant. My nostrils have a naughty twist. My brain is a whirl of evil fancies.

I gulp a cocktail. A snarl of hideous anticipation escapes me. I smack my lips. And I go downstairs and I get into the car.

I drive and drive. Mile upon mile upon mile. No sooner has one vast avenue been conquered, than another swings endless into view. There are constant hold-ups of the traffic. The thing is eternal. And gradually, I cease to pant. Slowly my nostrils resume their classic curve. Little by little my fingers cease to tremble. And finally, after an hour or so, the last devil has disappeared in despair, and my brain is filled with woolly lambs, capering about among Elysian daisies. In short, I fall asleep.

CHAPTER TWENTY

There is nothing else to do. One is already tired when one reaches a party, and as soon as one begins to recover, it is time to go to bed. On my first evening in Hollywood, somebody called me up and asked me to a party.

'Thank you,' I said. 'I'll be round at about eleven.'

'Gracious!' she replied. 'Everybody will have gone home to bed.'

She spoke truly. Hollywood is a worker's city. When one has to be at a studio at nine o'clock, rolling one's eyes before dazzling arc lamps, or climbing the side of a house in the sunlight, one does not prepare for it by drinking champagne till three o'clock in the morning. A few people have tried it, but they very shortly discovered that the silver screen cannot be cheated, that it is, indeed, an inexorable task-master.

Everybody who goes to Hollywood is filled with a secret and shameful passion to act in the movies. I was stirred by this passion myself, but I had no idea how I should be able to assuage it. Moreover, the very day after I arrived, I met Mr. Lasky, the renowned head of the Famous Players organization.

He took one look at me and then – apparently – his heart stood still. For he said:

'Would you like a job as a leading man?'

After assuring myself that he was serious I said 'Yes.' As a result of that one word I endured a morning's agony so acute that even now it is only with an effort that I can recall it.

My 'test' was timed for ten o'clock in the morning. I rose early, shaved with great care, chose a charming tie, brushed my hair till it shone, and studied the result.

The result seemed much as usual. I wondered what I could do about it. What expressions, for example, would one be called upon to assume? I decided that I would assume them all, and stood there registering rage, contempt, delight and surprise, until suddenly I noticed that I was being observed with terror by a coloured window-cleaner who had clambered up to my floor. I made a final grimace at him, and sauntered down to the car.

At the studio I was met by an assistant director, who took me without delay to see Mr. Collins, the chief maker-up – and, incidentally, an artist to his finger-tips.

'This is Mr. Nichols,' said my guide.

'Oh,' said Mr. Collins.

'His cheeks,' said my guide, 'have got rather plump in the last six weeks.'

'All these parties, you know,' I suggested.

For the first time Mr. Collins observed me with a faint interest. 'We might burn 'em out with lights,' he said.

My heart leapt. He might *what*? I had a vision of scarred flesh, – a sickly smell of burning seemed to fill the room.

Then Mr. Collins set my mind at ease. 'Personally,' he remarked, 'I should say his face was perfectly normal.'

Had he said that on any other occasion I should have been quite withering. Nobody likes to be told

that his face is 'normal.' But, at the moment, I positively rejoiced in my normality. I followed Mr. Collins meekly into the dressing-room.

No sooner had I seated myself than he hit me hard on the forehead with a piece of grease.

'I'm only doing this for fun,' I said.

'That's what they all say.'

'Why – do you get a lot of amateurs?'

'Yes. Every celebrity that comes here wants to be taken.'

I was about to beam at him for the implied compliment when he seized me firmly by the nose. And one cannot beam under such circumstances. He continued:

'A woman came in the other day and wanted me to make her up. I told her I was too busy. She got wild and said she used to be a countess in Austria. I said "You've got nothing on me – I did two princes yesterday." '

He let go my nose. I felt extremely humble. I began to apologize to him when he struck me a cruel blow with a powder-puff. I realized then that the only thing to do was to surrender body and soul, which I did. For the next few minutes such things were done to my face as no man has ever done before, nor ever will again. And just as I was on the point of rebellion, just as I had determined to rise to my full height and say, 'Well, anyway, I'd rather be a novelist,' he gave me a final chuck under the chin, said 'That's about all I can do for you,' and departed.

I was left breathless and alone – alone with my face. It felt terrible. It tickled all over and one half

of it seemed to be much bigger than the other. An awful thought seized me. Had he made me up in the manner of Lon Chaney? Should I find that I was another Hunchback of Notre Dame? I jumped from my seat and gazed in the glass.

It was worse than I feared. I was not in the least disguised. I was merely repellent. My face was jaundiced and yellow, my eyes were immense, my expression deathly. I felt obscene and looked it.

What was one to do? Gingerly, I touched the tip of my nose. The tickling became so agonizing that I quickly drew it away again for fear that I should be unable to resist wiping the stuff away in its entirety. Then I sneezed, over and over again. Hoping I might have sneezed off my face, I looked in the glass once more. No – it was still there – more disgusting than ever, because it really did look like a sort of parody of a matinée idol.

Well, there was nothing to be done. One must face the music. And since I felt extremely tragic, I decided that it was in that mood that I would meet the camera. I would twist my lip and roll my eyes and express, pictorially, that ' 'neath the bludgeonings of Fate, my head was bloody but unbowed.' Bloody, indeed, that was the word.

With this expression I stalked from the room. I had three flights of stairs to walk down. At each step my face registered a deeper and more poignant tragedy. A withered Japanese servant who was cleaning the door-handle took one look at me and slunk away. I felt elated. He had sensed the turmoil of my soul.

CHAPTER TWENTY

In this way I strode through the sunlight to the studio. I felt that I could keep the thing up for just ten minutes, no more. And had they been ready for me I believe that at this moment I should be glowering at you all from a myriad silver screens. But they were far from ready.

I entered the studio. There seemed to be nobody in it. On a distant stage a drama was in progress, in which a woman constantly hit a man over the head with a rope, but on my stage there was nobody at all. I paused – indeterminate. The tragic expression was already wearing thin. What should I do?

I heard footsteps behind me. I turned round and saw a man walking towards me. I said (keeping my lips rather firm so that expression should not be destroyed):

'I have come to have a test.'

'Yeah?' said the man, and walked on.

I almost spat at him in fury. I hoped that he would die of a lingering disease. I wanted to die myself. In despair I sank into a richly upholstered chair.

Instantly two workmen, previously concealed, yelled from the roof:

'Get off that chair!'

'Why should I get off it?'

'''Gainst the rules, you big stiff!'

Stiff! I – a stiff! I who had – who could – who was – *what*? What was I, in this damnable place? Why had I ever laid myself open to these indignities? I stood up, trying to look unconcerned. My only consolation was that perhaps these accumu-

lated misfortunes were, indeed, stamping their grim signature upon my face.

Well – I stood there for two whole hours. The woman on the other stage continued to hit her man on the head with the rope, the arc lamps continued to burn down till my eyes ached, and from time to time an occasional actor hurried by. I could find nobody who either expected or wished to see me.

At last, just as I was deciding to go away, an amiable-looking man strolled across the other end of the room, accompanied by three men with cameras. I hurried over to him:

'Excuse me,' I said, 'but are you by any chance making tests?'

'Yeah,' he said. 'But only of two girls. Can't find 'em, either.'

My face fell. Then, for the sake of saying something, 'Why can't you find them?'

'Polly Merril's sick, I guess,' said one of the men.

'What about the other, then?'

The first speaker glanced at a piece of paper. 'Don't know her.'

'What's her name?'

'Beverley Nichols.'

Whereupon, I walked up to him and turned upon him a full, tragic glare. 'Here she is,' I said. And the brute only laughed.

It is only with pain, and through a desire to warn all future aspirants to film fame, that I chronicle the subsequent events.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Firstly, I was dragged out of doors. They had waited so long that no studio was available. Therefore, instead of being comforted by four walls, and drugged by the force of artificial light, I had to grimace beneath God's own sunlight.

Had they chosen a solitary spot it would not have been so bad. But they chose one of the more populous corners of the premises – a corner round which there was a constant stream of persons, who had only to catch sight of me to remain rooted to the spot. Yet – what could one do about it? One could not cry 'go away' – one could not make rude faces at them. One had to go through with it.

We were joined by an exceedingly courteous man in an English suit, who was introduced to me as Mr. Tuttle.

Mr. Tuttle drew me aside, and smiled encouragingly. If he had been hostile I should have preferred it. He was, however, so agreeable that my uneasiness was accentuated.

'Now,' said Mr. Tuttle, 'let's see what we can think of.'

Yes. Let's. I could think of a great many things. I could think of my nose which was tickling like mad. I could think of a peculiarly hideous child who had stopped to gape at me, a few yards away. I could think of my cheeks, which seemed by now to have swollen to almost diseased proportions. But I could think of nothing which might illustrate my histrionic ability.

'Supposing,' he said, 'we had something with a letter –'

I nodded – in the subservient way which one used to nod when one's mathematics master was explaining a problem at school – 'A letter,' I repeated. At least I was not so far sunk in idiocy as not to know what a letter was.

'You see, you might do something like this . . .'

And then the nightmare began. The tragedy which I was requested to enact was laid along the following lines. I was to meet Mr. Tuttle, who was to hand me a letter. I was to glance at this letter, look suspicious of it, put it in my pocket, thank him, and say good-bye.

That was Act I.

Act II contained the real test. I had to follow with my eyes the departing figure of Mr. Tuttle. I then had to take from my pocket the letter, and study the envelope. What is familiar about it? Ah! A perfume! Delicately I lift the letter to my nose. Can it be . . . can it? I sniff again. Yes – it is! It's from Tessie, the little devil! A wise and roguish look illuminates my features. I'm not going to open any letter from that little – pardon, from her. So I tear up the letter into a hundred pieces. Tableau.

On hearing the outline of this story, my soul was plunged into night. It was a story for which I felt no sort of 'urge.' Apart from the fact that I could never, in any circumstances, cultivate an acquaintanceship with any girl who called herself Tessie and used perfumed notepaper, the whole thing was psychologically unsympathetic. If there is one thing I adore in this life it is to open letters. I could open them all day long.

Nor is it among my keener pleasures to assume a roguish expression. A cynical smile – yes, – a bleak and haggard despair, if you will, but roguery – no.

However – how could I explain these things to Mr. Tuttle? Had I done so he would have been perfectly justified in replying that I had come here to act, not merely to be myself. And that if I did not wish to act I could do the other thing.

So when he said, 'Now we'll just rehearse that,' I assented, and followed him, with trembling knees, to the camera.

'Now you meet me,' said Mr. Tuttle.

I met Mr. Tuttle. I kept on meeting him. But somehow I did not put into the meeting that abandonment of welcome which was desired.

'Aren't you pleased to meet me?' asked Mr. Tuttle.

'Am I?'

'Of course you are.'

'I see.' I went back. I grinned like a horse. I lifted my hand high and clapped it into that of Mr. Tuttle.

'Fine!' cried the camera man. 'We'll shoot that.'

They shot it.

By now I felt utterly exhausted. To force one's imagination so brutally into such unwonted channels needs more energy than one expends in a whole act of a play, or several chapters of a novel. Yet – the thing had to be done.

'The next step,' said Mr. Tuttle, 'is where you look at the letter, notice its perfume, sniff it, ponder, sniff again, smile and tear it up.'

'Sniff, ponder, sniff, smile?' I repeated.

'No. Look, notice, sniff, ponder, sniff, smile.'

'I see.' I tried it out.

'No,' said Mr. Tuttle. 'You want to take your time.'

I tried again. I gave a long and lingering sniff.

'What's he smellin' that old bit of paper for?' asked one of the onlooking girls.

'Gawd knows,' replied her sweet companion. 'Let's get on.'

They got on. I turned to look at them.

'Never mind them,' said Mr. Tuttle, 'just think the part.'

To the best of my ability, I thought it. I looked, I noticed, I sniffed, I pondered, I sniffed again, and then, with a supreme effort, I broke into a tortured smile.

And that was all.

As I was coming away Mr. Tuttle joined me. 'You aren't, by any chance, a relation of a man who wrote a book called *Twenty-five*, are you?'

'I wrote it,' I said gloomily.

He shook my hand with great vigour. 'Well,' he said, 'if you can give us any more books like that I hope you won't abandon writing in favour of acting.'

'I shall not,' I said.

They tell me that the test was a great success. I have not seen it. There are some illusions which one prefers to cherish.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Christ in Vaudeville

'No, brother. Sister McPherson isn't here tonight. But we have two wonderful child revivalists. Jackie and Violet Van Gundy. Jackie is nine and Violet is eleven. I'm sure they'll give you a swell time.'

I stared at my 'sister.' I was standing in the hall of the Angelus Temple at Los Angeles, the headquarters of Mrs. Aimée Semple McPherson. A friend had suggested to me that if I wished to see a religious revivalist meeting I could not do better than visit this temple. And so, in a quite innocent spirit, I set out to visit it.

I continued to stare at my 'sister.' She was about seventy. She was clad in a costume which appeared to start as an angel and end as a waitress. Her face was coated with violet powder. Her eyes were the flaming eyes of a fanatic. I shuddered, and passed in.

The Temple is some way from the centre of Los Angeles, in a district plentifully served by bright yellow gasolene stations, and billboards from which huge heads of girls glare out into the night. It looks like a church which has been turned, first into a movie palace, and next into a research works. From its domes rise the gaunt skeleton of a broadcasting station Its pillars are lit by a garish green light.

When I first entered this singular edifice I had to stand up to wait for a seat. The auditorium was packed from floor to ceiling. At a conservative

estimate the congregation must have numbered five thousand. They were all tense, silent, listening to a boy and a girl. Some hypnotic power switched my eyes toward the stage and held them there.

Against a background of flowers, underneath an immense picture of Jesus Christ, two children with grinning faces were singing into a loud-speaker. The girl was dressed in white, the boy wore a neat blue suit. Their shrill treble voices, accompanied by The Temple's 'Great Silver Band,' penetrated to the remotest recesses of the hall. They were singing:

'Let's go
Let's go
To the land where th' milk and *hon* – ey flow.'

Over and over again they sang this song. It was set to a form of ragtime. Now and then the boy cocked his head, grinned even more widely, and interjected a 'Praise the Lord!' or an 'Ay-men.' Each time he did so, the crowd roared its applause, as though some comedian had made a particularly witty gag.

The song came to an end. As it ended, I was swept forward in an irresistible mass of humanity. I found myself, at last, in a balcony almost overlooking the stage. There was a moment's lull. Somebody was preaching a sermon. There was an opportunity to look around.

I was almost facing the crowd. Close-wedged, it ranged from the dizzy heights of the gallery to the sweating thousands on the main floor. The faces were coloured by the lights which shone through the

stained-glass windows. Every face was craned towards the stage.

This stage was a strange sight. It had a background portraying crudely-painted trees and mountains, suggestive of a drop scene in vaudeville. It was gay with festoons of artificial flowers. On the left there was a placard, 'Praise the Lord,' on the right another placard bearing the mystic words 'Filling Station' – words whose purpose I did not comprehend. Above this stage, in a balcony, was assembled a choir of about forty men and women. And crowning everything was the brilliantly illuminated picture of Jesus Christ.

I studied that picture. As a work of art, it was atrocious, but there was an expression on the face which caused one to pause – an expression of gentle bewilderment. The eyes seemed to scan the crowd – so fiercely welded in His worship. They seemed to light on the loud-speakers, on the silver band, on the painted children, on the vast music-hall apparatus gathered together for His glory. And His eyes were puzzled.

So, I must confess, were mine. My attention had been drawn back to the stage by a further burst of applause. Looking down, one observed that a child about four years old was mounting the steps. It advanced to the centre of the stage, bowed with all the self-possession of the conventional infant-prodigy, and began to speak.

What happened then was so revolting that I am not sure if I can accurately report it. I hold the belief that it is criminal, in any circumstance, to fill

a child's head with religious dogma before it is capable of elementary judgment. And to see a child set up before a huge crowd of neurotics, gabbling nonsense in the name of God, was not a sight which particularly amused me.

Yet, it appeared to amuse the child. She began by reciting a poem called 'The Little Maid's Amen.' Her accent was hideous, but not so hideous as her words. It was a story which, apparently, concerned the little maid's father, for there were many delicate and whimsical references to 'dad' and 'pops.' My bewildered ears caught a phrase about 'dad *will* keep his elbow on the dinner-table' and then, after several injunctions of Jesus Christ, another phrase adjuring 'dad' 'not to stick his crackers in the soup – praise the Lord.'

Desperately I looked around me. Was I losing my reason? Apparently not. Nobody seemed to be protesting. Their eyes were glued to the stage as though in ecstasy. And their mass influence forced mine back once more.

The picture was unforgettable. There stood this horrible infant, clad in a white, skimpy skirt. Her naked knees were unwashed. Over her plain and wizened face there flitted a smile that suggested both the idiocy of youth and the ennui of old age. She ceased to speak. The applause which greeted her, as she left the stage, was loud enough to fell the walls of Jericho.

I tried to escape. But it was again too late. For the master of the ceremonies had approached the loud-speaker, and was shouting: 'Now, will every

member of the congregation please turn round and shake as many people as possible by the hand, so that we may all praise the Lord together.'

Instinctively, I put my hands behind my back. I dislike shaking hands with perspiring strangers. And if at any time I wish to praise the Lord – I am vain enough to imagine that I can probably do so with greater concentration and better grammar by myself.

However, my hand was seized from me. I looked up, and saw an immense young man who, had he been properly brought up, would have been prize-fighting. He crushed my hand. 'Praise the Lord, brother!' he cried. 'Praise the Lord!'

To which, in my astonishment, I could only reply 'How d'you do?'

Fortunately, my blasphemy passed unnoticed. And the next instant I was the victim of a similar spasm from a young woman in a distressing hat. I wanted to tell her about that hat – gently, of course, but firmly. However, what could one do? From right and left my hand was being seized. I felt that they must all know how deeply I was sunk in sin. Some psychic sense was telling them where I had spent the previous night. Had I been the subject of such marked attention in other surroundings I should have flattered myself that they liked my looks. But a single glance at the young woman with the hat was sufficient to dispel such an illusion.

Then, all at once, the lights went out. There was a roar of anticipation. Across the walls they flashed the words of a hymn, projected by a movie camera,

immensely enlarged for all to see. The first words, if I remember rightly, were:

'Stand Fast, brother
Stand Fast, sister
Stand on the word of God.'

With a noise like the rushing of a mighty wind the crowd rose to its feet. At the end of the first verse, a thousand hands stretched forward in a sort of Fascist salute, holding their Bibles at arm's length. At the end of the second verse, the same thing happened, with accentuated frenzy. Women were dribbling at the mouth. Young men's eyes were wet with tears.

I drew back against the wall. The air was hot with menace. Out of these close-pressed thousands a corporate spirit was being born, a spirit fierce and avenging, animated by the sullen brutality of the Old Testament God. I seemed to see burning eyes fixed upon me, such eyes as the early heretics must have seen. I seemed to hear hoarse voices denouncing me, calling me to confess my sins, or pay the consequences. Had the crowd remained a crowd, one would not have minded. But the crowd was becoming a person. It was being welded, through madness, into unity. Five thousand tongues were speaking as one, five thousand pairs of eyes were lit by the same maniacal fire. Somehow or other I managed to reach the door. I stumbled outside into the sweet night air, vowing never to venture in that place again. But I broke my vow.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

It was Wednesday – the night of the great Aimée Semple McPherson's return. I had been told to come early, since it was a special occasion, and it was lucky that I did so, for an hour before the beginning of the service several thousand people had already assembled.

Before I felt at ease, I had to change my seat several times. My first seat would have been comfortable enough had it not been for the presence of an earnest young man on the left, who persisted in clasping my knee and calling me 'brother.' Had he merely clasped my knee, I might have endured it. Had he merely called me 'brother' I might have kept my composure. But the two together made me giggle. I tried to make the giggle sound like a form of religious hysteria, but the strain was so great that I rose and seated myself elsewhere.

Here, in a few moments, I was joined by a woman and a baby. By keeping my eyes firmly fixed on the stage I managed to avoid any physical or verbal intercourse with her. But by no effort of hypnotism could I have quieted her infant. The moment it perceived me it emitted a tragic, strangled sob. It continued to emit sobs. It appeared to be suffocating. I turned to the woman, and was about to remonstrate with her, when she said:

'Just at the cute age, isn't she?'

The age of the infant appeared to me to be anything but cute. It seemed an age without any charm at all. I could think of nothing to say to the woman, so I nodded my head feebly, and left her. She probably thought I was dumb and had come to be healed by a miracle.

I seated myself at last next to a couple who were gazing into each other's eyes with the sort of rapt expression which one sees at the movies when Greta Garbo is on the point of surrendering her soul. They looked quite harmless, and could obviously be trusted to keep themselves to themselves. I anchored myself in their vicinity, and prepared for an hour of dullness.

But the hour was anything but dull. The guiding spirit of Mrs. McPherson saw to that. Even while the audience was filing in, we were constantly entertained. First there was an orchestral selection, then a little speech, then the organist played something. Nothing 'classical,' of course – we don't want Bach – but something nice, that showed off the bells, which chimed so effectively through a succession of loud-speakers attached to the roof. Meanwhile, the lights were switched up and down, down and up, just to make us feel that something was happening. When they were down, we were edified by magic-lantern slides, projected on to the wall. One of these particularly appealed to me, principally because the operator, whose religious fervour had evidently clouded his mentality, persistently inserted it upside down. However, eventually it was shown us in its proper state. It portrayed a somewhat misshapen ship, sailing through a sea of charcoal. Underneath I read the words 'The Harbour of After Awhile,' by Aimée Semple McPherson. One gathered that this work could be purchased, for a stated fee, from Ye Goodwill Bookshop, which was attached to the Temple.

Under these beguiling influences the hour sped by with great rapidity. And as each minute passed, the advent of the Presence became evidently nearer and nearer. One felt her spiritual influence in the crescendo of saxophones from the band, one sensed it in the ever-increasing mass of expensive roses which they were piling on the platform. And when the organ eventually burst into a thunderous peal, and we all rose to our feet, we knew that at any moment She – She, the Ageless and the Spotless one – would be in our midst. Louder, louder, grew the voices. She is coming . . . coming . . .

'Christ our Saviour, our Salvation . . .' She is here! The door on the left has swung open. A spotlight sweeps down. It lights up a smiling, bowing figure, making its way to the stage. The figure holds an immense bouquet of roses. The smile is brilliant, dominating. She turns and kisses her hand to right and left. There is a roar of applause. She mounts the steps like any *prima donna*. More bows, more hand-wavings – always the brilliant smile. The Star is here. I have a feeling that the light has faded from the picture of Christ, that it is all flooding down upon Mrs. Aimée Semple McPherson. And once again, His eyes are puzzled.

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In a moment, I will tell you what she did. First, however, let us endeavour to solve the problem of what she *is*.

She is called *The Evangelist with the Sex Appeal*. Maybe the title pleases her – maybe not. One can-

not judge of the likes and dislikes of such a past mistress in the art of vulgarity. But if the title does displease her, she will be delighted to hear that I consider it misplaced. She is vital, and dominant, but she is not appealing – in that way.

See her as I saw her, standing upon that stage. Her reddish hair is coiffed with unusual elaboration. It is curled and puffed and twisted into a glimmering, complicated design. One feels that she takes so long in doing it every morning that by the time she has also said her prayers it must be time for lunch.

Her eyes are large, bright, and restless. Nothing escapes them. Although I was a model of decorum throughout the service, and only scribbled a few notes on a very small piece of paper with a tiny pencil, I felt like a naughty school-child who was being watched by his school-teacher. She scans every individual in the multitude. She sees the danger-spots, e.g., the babies, and quells them into submission. She fixes her eyes on the late-comers, and roots them to the spot, in the centre of the aisle, until her 'stunt' is finished. She is the complete hypnotist.

Her smile remains her outstanding characteristic. With certain exceptions, hereafter to be noted, it appears to be perpetual. It says 'See how happy I am in the love of Jesus Christ! Gee – I feel swell! All my troubles gone, all my burdens on His Shoulders! Isn't He a dandy friend?' (That last phrase is an actual quotation from one of her more lyrical utterances.)

Yes, brothers and sisters, a clever woman. But not quite so clever as she might be. I noted certain

moments when her smile failed her. Here is one of them. During a long and somewhat tedious song, to which she listened with an expression of apparent rapture, one of the infant evangelists who was sitting next to her constantly tried to gain her attention by pulling at her skirt. 'Sister' did not at first notice this – her ecstasy was presumably too intense. But after the third tug, she could not help paying attention. And as she turned to the child I had an impression of a rather irritable mother turning sharply to rebuke a fidgety child, then, remembering that she was under observation, assuming, for the benefit of her audience, the sweet smile of mother-love.

I felt, too, that she might have been a little less obviously solicitous of the radio fans. However great her emotion, however spontaneous her 'Praise the Lords,' I could not help observing that she held them in check until she was within calling distance of the radio apparatus. Give her the benefit of the doubt, and assume that she was merely anxious for her winged words to penetrate to the greatest possible number of human souls, absent or present. The sceptic will still be inclined to wonder why there was not, let us say, one 'Praise the Lord,' which was not delivered, so very articulately, into the microphone.

And now – what did she do? What was it all about?

Well – I do not pretend to be able to reproduce, word for word, what she said. You may thank your stars that I never learned shorthand. All I can recall

is a hoarse, vibrant voice, shouting into a microphone, usually talking about herself, employing many colloquialisms, and frequently calling – rather as an afterthought – upon the name of the Lord. This is a fair specimen of her style:

'Well, brothers and sisters, it surely is fine to be back. They've all been wonderful to me away, but there's only one Angelus Temple.' (Applause and shouts of 'Praise God!' in which I can join with all sincerity.) 'Still, I do want to tell you of the time I've had. I'm able to say that there have been literally thousands and thousands who've found the word of God.' (There follow a great many statistics – 2,000 at the Rotary Club – 10,000 at the Colosseum, etc., etc., together with a casual reference to the fact that the Governor of the State and his wife had been regular attendants at all her services – Praise the Lord).

You see the idea? She is saying to them 'Here I am! I'm a local product and I'm the success of successes! Aren't you proud of me? Give the little girl a hand!'

She is talking of miracles. 'One old woman at Des Moines was carried up in a state of exhaustion.' She puts her hands on her hips and grins. 'Gee – I thought she was going to die right there on the stage!' (Loud laughter.) 'But' – and her voice is suddenly soft and crooning – 'the glory of the Lord shone down upon her and she was able to rise and walk.' (From all over the auditorium hands are raised into the familiar Fascist salute and there is a resounding of 'Praise the Lord.')

She goes on and on. She is inexhaustible. She has

us all beat. If I were to attempt to debate with her I should find myself, after half an hour, sinking into a chair, utterly devitalized. It is impossible to fight that militant, cunning vigour.

Most remarkable of all is her gift for showmanship. Never for an instant does she allow the party to flag. If there is the slightest feeling of restiveness in the congregation, if there is the least slackening in the tension of hysteria, she senses it instinctively, and starts a new 'stunt' without a second's delay.

For example: She has asked all the first-nighters to come up on to the stage and shake hands with her. From all corners of the building they advance. Thirty have mounted already, and the centre aisle is packed with hundreds who are waiting. She shakes hands rapidly, calling out the name of the city from which each person hails. 'Denver, Montreal, Des Moines, Cincinnati –' For a minute or two the crowd watches and listens intently, applauding from time to time when they hear the name of their home town. But the mere sight of 'Sister' shaking hands is not particularly exciting. In a moment, their attention will begin to wander.

'Sister' observes this, sees the throngs still waiting, thinks for a second, then steps forward and with a graceful flutter of her hands cries out 'Now let's have a little tune on our lovely organ while I'm greeting these new folks.' The organist is startled, unready. 'Sister' darts a sharp look at the girl, assumes again her brilliant smile, and cries, 'Let's give our little organist a clap – doesn't she deserve it?' The crowd claps and by the time the applause has subsided, the

organist is ready, and plays a peal of melody, which continues until the last hand-shaker is bustled off the stage.

The final scene of this amazing evening was so mad that I shall not attempt to describe it in detail. My mind is full of a whirl of pictures – her white arms beckoning to the baptismal candidates – a stream of men and women, young and old – pushing and scrambling to the stage – shouts and yells from all parts of the building as they were totally immersed in the water – accompanied by 'Sister' herself – a hysterical feeling that it was all like a macabre edition of mixed bathing – and then, when the last candidate was baptized, a sudden exit by 'Sister' in her dripping clothes, to be followed, only a minute and a half later, by her triumphant reappearance in a brand-new frock, her nose freshly powdered.

Praise – praise the Lord!

On the way home, since I had omitted to be baptized, I entered a drug-store and purchased an immense bottle of bath-salts. It bore the seductive title 'Cendres du Passion.' I felt burnt out myself, and wished to be restored to a state of sophistication. The cinders of passion succeeded in soothing me, and after a couple of whiskies and sodas, I departed, warm and cleansed, to bed. But not to sleep. For, at the Temple, I had purchased a copy of Mrs. McPherson's Journal, *The Foursquare Crusader*, and it was quite impossible to contemplate repose until its contents had been digested.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Across the top of the paper was printed the information that 'The Foursquare Crusader' had been 'entered as second-class matter under the Act of March 3, 1879.' With that classification I heartily agreed.

Splashed over the front page was a photograph entitled 'God's Foursquare Flower Garden.' I wish that I might have the pleasure of describing a picture as exquisite as these words suggest, but I cannot. For it was nothing more than a photograph of the irritating Van Gundy children, taken on the stage as I had seen them on the previous Sunday. There they stood, with idiot smiles upon their faces, holding the bouquets which, in the words of the subtitle, had been 'loaned from God's flower garden.'

I turned the page as quickly as possible, and blinked. In staring headlines, I read:

GO TO JESUS FOR CONSULTATION. HE IS THE PLASTIC SURGEON WHO WILL TELL YOU ABOUT BEAUTY SECRETS.

I glanced guiltily around me. I felt as one always feels when one is in possession of something improper – that a policeman is on the point of arresting one. To read that headline made me blush as violently as I should blush if I were found carrying obscene postcards through the Douane at Calais. However, no policeman appeared to be in the room. Only a shaded lamp, a smouldering cigarette, and a strong odour of 'Cendres du Passion.' So, with a sigh of relief, I read:

'Beauty secrets! You can't open a magazine, book or anything else any day unless you see right in front of you

some one special way of getting beautiful. They tell you of hundreds and hundreds of ways. Some advertise pills, cold creams and bleachers, others tell you to take powders, and still others a certain kind of exercise.

The only way to be beautiful is to give your heart to the Lord. The moment you come to the Lord and go into His great consultation room, He puts you under the great white light. He is the plastic surgeon – He can take any life no matter how homely or ugly you were before being converted, and He will mould and model you into a beautiful life.

Starts to Work.

He looks at you – and then He starts to work. It may be your eyes are not kindly as they should be. He looks down and sees a little bit of envy and hatred for your neighbour. He takes His big knife and starts to cut it away. He takes out the hate and puts in love and thus He works on your eyes until they are just like the chart He has in His great office.

Then He looks into your mouth . . .'

But what the Lord does when He looks into your mouth I must leave to the imagination of my readers. I will only add that the article was illustrated by a picture of the authoress, who rejoiced in the name of Miss Roberta Star Semple. From the features portrayed, I concluded that Miss Semple's views on the beautifying power of religion were overrated.

Once more I turned the page. And this time I sat right up in bed. For the words of the 'Sister' herself were staring me in the face. And the words were these:

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

DEFINITE INSTRUCTIONS IN GOD'S WORD TO BECOME AND STAY RICH.

God's Financial Plan still applies to the Widow and the King – to
Everyone who takes Him into partnership.
By
Aimée Semple McPherson.

I laid down the paper. I was thinking, rather hard. I remembered Mrs. McPherson's Clarion Call – 'That last collection was too noisy – let's have a quiet, reverent collection this time!' – i.e., let's dispense with the nickels and give only dollar bills. I remembered, too, a shabby old woman fumbling in her purse, dragging out the only note that reposed in it, and dropping it with trembling fingers into the plate. I remembered the raucous voice of the master of ceremonies when he had been appealing, before 'Sister's' entrance, for more money to give her a home such as she deserved. 'Definite Instructions in God's Word to become and stay Rich.'

Quite.

I really could not be bothered to do more than skim through this article. It was a tedious hotch-potch of sentimentality and false analogy. I preferred to turn, as a relief, to the 'Sister's' oratorical, as distinct from her prose, style. The following extract is a report of a sermon which she had delivered a few days before, dressed in the uniform of a motor-cycle policeman, to an audience of 6,500 persons at Des Moines.

According to the Des Moines *Register* of March

21, Mrs. McPherson opened her sermon in these words:

'Speed! Speed! Speed!

'Thundering – rocketing – hurtling – midst swirling dust and fleeing forms!

'Speed! Speed! S-p-e-e-d!

'Spinning, whirling, dancing, blurring, the dizzing roads slip underneath. White-faced mile posts loom meteor-like for a split second and are gone.

'On! On! On!

'O'er the highway of sin and along the broad way of destruction; flying wheels flirt with the crumbling edges of the chasm of despair; skirt by the fraction of an inch gaping horror of immediate judgment.

'Ha! Ha! Ha!

'That's showing some speed! Mighty near the edge that time, eh what?

'Up and after them!

'Out into the melee – out into the ragin', roaring road spring God's traffic officers – evangelists, mothers, conscience!

'God has sent forth His officers on motor-cycles of mercy, warning, judgment ever since the eyes of Adam and Eve were opened.

'God has spoken to us again and again by the traffic officer of example – by the wrecks we have seen along the way. Oh, brother, stop! Oh, sister, stop at the cross to-night.

'Young man, it is you I am after. Young lady, it is you I want. Pull to the right and stop at the cross of Calvary.'

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

To which might well be added the immortal words once appended by an undergraduate friend of mine to Tennyson's 'Princess' – '*exit, pursued by a cow.*'

Other people's dreams are often a bore. But that night I had a dream so hideous that even now it chills me.

I dreamed that I was in the dressing-room of a third-rate theatre. The air was stuffy with the smell of grease paint – the cloths on the make-up table were soiled and grey.

The room was brilliantly lit, and two people were in it – a man and a woman. The woman's face I could not see, but the man's was a face upon which I dared not look, for it was the face of Christ. And as once there had been a time when His face was contorted with pain, so now was it contorted with paint, for the woman was making him up. There was no blood upon His lips, but His mouth was slashed with crimson. There were no lines of weariness under His eyes, but His lashes were thick with mascara. Upon His head was no crown of thorns, but a wig set grotesquely awry.

The door opened and in the distance I could hear the sound of a vast audience, clamouring for their favourite comedian. They were growing impatient. I could hear whistles and the stamp of a thousand restless feet. 'Come out – come out,' they cried. There was a band too – playing with the mad monotony of dream music, a band that repeated itself over

and over again . . . fighting the answering voices of the crowd . . . 'Come out – come out.'

The woman speaks. Hazily I seem to recall that throaty voice. 'Quick, quick – we must hurry! The last call has come!' And into His hands she thrusts something. A reed? No. A walking-stick – knobbed and twisted . . . the conventional walking-stick of the low comedian . . . and He goes out . . .

Still wider swings the door. The woman stands looking after Him, her hands on her hips. She is listening anxiously. Suddenly there is a roar of applause, a bellow of whistles and yells, and then a still, quiet voice . . .

'Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.'

And the woman turns, grinning broadly, her work completed. I see her face. I need not tell you who she is.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Pagliacci

And now I can tell the story of a dream which came true.

Since childhood I have always had a secret longing to play the piano in a movie palace. Fiercely did I envy the young women who pounded in the bass during a stampede of cowboys, softly slaughtered Offenbach's barcarolle while the heroine was being seduced by moonlight, and indulged in an orgy of consecutive fifths at the remotest suggestion of a murder. I chafed at their incompetency. I found them especially inefficient during the news-reels. They never seemed to know how to change gracefully from Chopin's Funeral March – (illustrative of 'Ruritania's Millions Mourn Murdered Archbishop') – into the gay and lilting measure of a Scottish reel, – (to accompany 'Highland Games draw Record Crowds at Ballywhiffwhoff').

I could have done much better. I knew exactly how to turn from the Chopin funeral march into the Scottish reel, and I had a patent method for making the sudden transition seem less indecent by playing the first few bars of the reel in a minor key. I had thought of all sorts of subtle touches for other occasions. If, for instance, Paderewski should ever be called upon to inspect the British Fleet – (and there was no law of Nature to prevent him from doing so) – I had, in readiness, a charming little fugue based on the melody of Rule Britannia. My music-master, who was keener on patriotism than

on counterpoint, considered the fugue revolutionary and improper, which convinced me of its merit. And if, at any time, I were to find myself called upon to illustrate, musically, an attempt to cross Niagara on a tight rope, I had a plan to play the national anthem of the country to which the athlete belonged, and accompany it with a positive deluge of arpeggios, illustrative of the roaring waters of that singular cataract.

Hours and hours of my youth were thus misspent. I have no excuse for this diversion, but I cannot help recalling those long summer evenings when I sat at the piano, accompanying imaginary films which flickered on the darkening walls. I would make up endless dramas, prolonging the agony until my fingers could no longer re-act to the crowding images. Each character would have a melodic theme, which I scribbled down on an envelope, and when those two characters met each other, either in love or in hate, the two themes would also meet, in harmony or in discord. Sometimes the exigencies of the story would demand that all the characters would meet at once, and then I was in a quandary, for I could not quite see how one could combine four themes without a far more elaborate study of counterpoint than was possible in the heat of the moment. Therefore, when they *did* meet, I would make their meeting as brief as possible, and switch to a close-up (incredibly vivid on the opposite wall) – or dart away, with a happy gallop in the treble, over the hills of spring.

All dreams come true – sooner or later – which is

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one of the many reasons why one should endeavour to discipline the subconscious. And those dreams which were spun, like silver threads, through the fading fabric of my youth, were suddenly to find their fulfilment in Hollywood, at the house of one whom I have called Pagliacci, whom the world knows as Charlie Chaplin.

A wise and learned man told me that whenever he came across a chapter about Charlie Chaplin in a book of American impressions, he skipped it, because everything that could be said about Charlie Chaplin had been said. I think it would be nearer the truth to say that nothing which could be said about Charlie Chaplin has been said. In any case, whichever point of view you may adopt, the matter is for the moment immaterial, because I have no intention of surrendering my seat at the organ in Charlie Chaplin's house, where, for the first time in my life, my dream came true.

The dream was even more happy in fulfilment than in anticipation. We had been dining with Charlie Chaplin, and afterwards he suggested that we might like to see Greta Garbo in 'Anna Karenina' (for some mysterious reason renamed 'Love'). We decided that we would. We therefore trooped into the hall, and sat down in front of a silver screen.

It was at this moment that I observed the organ. Instantly, a thousand repressions rose up from the mists of childhood. We were about to see a film. We were without any musical accompaniment. A few yards away was an organ, with idle keyboards – an organ that longed to be given the breath of life.

I caught Chaplin's eye, and pointed to the organ. He nodded. In an instant I was sitting in front of it.

There is a charming advertisement, extensively printed in American papers, which proclaims the merits of a home piano course. It begins with the arresting words: – 'They laughed when I sat down at the piano, but when I began to play. . . .' I have read it a hundred times, exulting with the young man who beams from the centre of the page – the young man who had previously been a social failure. He was turned, by a few hours of study, into a pianist whose performance had an almost erotic effect upon his audience. I could not judge as to the effect which my own performance had upon this particular audience. Their faces were – perhaps mercifully – veiled in darkness. But its effect upon me was decidedly erotic. To employ a *vox humana* stop in homage to Greta Garbo, to pull out the *tremolo* to match the flicker of her eyelids, to tread, fatalistically, upon the pedals as the tragedy deepened, to have at one's command the roar of brass for passion, the agony of muted violins for despair – if there are more satisfactory methods of working off one's superfluous emotion, I should be glad to learn them. And now, we will consider the diversion at an end.

I had need, on that evening, of 'working off superfluous emotion.' Charlie Chaplin had told me a story of the bitterness of his own childhood. He said:

' "When I was at school, in East London, there was only one time in the year when we had a treat, and that was at Christmas. Then we were given an orange and a packet of sweets.

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'"For months ahead, I had been dreaming of my Christmas present. I had decided exactly what I would do with it. I would keep the orange and the sweets under my jersey, held up by my belt, and I would make them last as long as they possibly could.

'"First I was going to eat a little of the orange peel. That would last for several days. Then I should eat the orange itself, – one section at a time. I knew that there were eight sections to each orange so that altogether I should be able to spread the orange out over a fortnight.

'"After that I should begin on the sweets. I decided that I should have one sweet a day, sucking a little of it in the morning, a little in the afternoon and the last bit at night. I should never allow myself to crunch it up, because that would have been gross extravagance. Perhaps I might crunch the very last one. I hadn't decided that . . .

'"But I never had any sweets or any oranges. On the day before Christmas I was so excited that I forgot to make my bed. I was in disgrace. When all the other boys went up to get their presents, I stayed behind. Most of the other boys thought it was rather funny – I suppose it was, in a way. But two of them knew the tragedy I was going through. They gave me a sweet each. I made those two sweets last a fortnight."'

I wish that I might have been there to give Charlie Chaplin a whole barrel of sweets and oranges.

Many have written of the sadness of Charlie Chaplin. To me, at first, he seemed more than

merely sad. He seemed convinced of the utter futility of human existence. Many people who share that conviction are yet able from time to time to find an amusement in the futility, to contemplate with interest the various spectacles, beautiful or grotesque, which offer themselves at the side of the road, even when they feel assured that the road leads nowhere. But Chaplin, when I first met him, was looking only to his destination: which was Nothing.

I think that this mood was induced by his matrimonial troubles. I do not know any of the persons whom he honoured by marriage. The nearest I ever approached to his last wife was about fifty feet away from her in a restaurant, and that was quite near enough. And apart from the opinion of her character which I formed after reading the evidence in the trial, I know nothing, except that she eats too much and that I dislike her features.

It was this delectable creature who considered herself too good for Charlie Chaplin, left him and plunged him, temporarily, into misery. I do not believe that the misery was caused so much by her desertion as an individual as by the sense it gave him of being deserted by the whole world. After all, she was not his first wife, though, for his own sake, I hope she was his last. It was not only the loss of *her* radiant charms and girlish appetite which darkened his spirit. It was simply the fact that this loss was the symbol of a far greater loss . . . the loss of something which he had never found. Some people are born to go through life alone, and Charlie Chaplin is one of them.

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We began by talking about cancer. I have no idea why I suddenly branch off into such a happy, whimsical subject, but it occurred to me that I had been writing for a long time without arriving at any particular point, and that I had better arrive at it as soon as possible.

We began, therefore, by talking about cancer. It was at a house by the sea, with the Californian sunlight flooding through the windows, and in the distance the hiss of waves on the beach, and, a little nearer, the hiss of Elinor Glyn on the sofa. Charlie Chaplin had an extraordinary theory about cancer. He believed that it was the effort of the body to fulfil the subconscious desire for death which is dormant in every human being. Put it in another way. Every man, at some time or other in his life, has a longing for death. To some men the longing comes so acutely that it is translated into action. Those men are the suicides. To others, it comes only fitfully, and never with sufficient force to cause them actually to take their lives. Those men are the neurotics. To most of us the desire seldom declares itself in words. It lurks in the subconscious – giving, on some dark winter evening, an echo to which we dare not listen – crying, on some desolate dawn, in a tone which we desperately ignore. But the body does not ignore it. And if the cry is repeated too often, the body begins to take heed of that which the mind neglects. The result is Cancer.

I do not know if this theory is Charlie Chaplin's alone, or if it is the reflection of some psychotherapeutical theory which he had read. I only

mention it as an example both of the diversity of his interests and the inherent melancholy of his mind. I saw many proofs of that melancholy – in his discussion of men and books, in his observations on the state of England, in his entire attitude towards the female members of the earth's inhabitants. Indeed, as soon as I met him, I felt that over his face there was cast the same shadow that lurked on the face of Edgar Allan Poe, who wrote:

'I was not indeed ignorant of the flowers nor the vine, but the cypress and the hemlock overshadowed me night and day.'

Few things are more boring than abstract discussions of movie æsthetics. I was constantly being forced to listen to them in Hollywood. A man like Von Sternberg was vital and absorbing, but the rest. . . . One director would tell you that he saw everything in angles, and that he was about to produce the perfect film of the mechanistic life. Another director would tell you that he saw everything in clouds and that he was going to eliminate from the screen all those harsh lines which, according to him, were the curse of Art. As a rule, these things interested me not at all. I would far rather have learnt the one exciting thing about them – i.e. how many dollars they received a week, and how, in the name of reason, they had been able to persuade anybody that they were worth it.

But Charlie Chaplin told me something which did, at least, explain why his films have always so far greater a degree of *unity* than the films of other men.

I said to him: 'Even when your story is disjointed, it seems to have a uniform colour. Even when the incidents are disconnected they appear to be joined by a unity of thought. Why is that?'

He replied: 'Perhaps it is because, when I am making a picture, I have always, running through my head, a certain melody. It would be too much to say that I set everything to that melody, because one can't set such a diversity of action to music. But at least it means that I achieve a unity of mood and of rhythm. If your whole mind is ringing with the Scherzo of the Kreutzer Sonata you will be unable to keep step in a funeral march, however hard you try. It is all a question of rhythm – like everything else in life.'

Sometimes Charlie Chaplin gave one the feeling that no tune so light and sparkling as the Scherzo from the Kreutzer Sonata had ever entered his head. At other times you would think he was tripping about to a secret melody of 'Yes, we have no bananas' (which, incidentally, was based, probably unconsciously, upon a passage from a Brahms Symphony). He was the moodiest of creatures, stepping quickly from the shadow into the blazing sunlight, and then back into the shadow again.

It was this which made him so amazing a mimic. I have seen him, in a single evening, give uncannily faultless imitations of Raquel Meller, of a Toreador, of an old woman, and of a certain President of the United States.

But it was not till later in the evening, when I was suddenly attracted by strange noises from the

servants' quarters, that I learnt how much deeper is his mimicry than mere caricature. I followed the direction of the noises out of the hall, through the dining-room, until I reached the pantry. There, on a stool, stood Charlie Chaplin before a dozen cheering guests. His eyes were blazing, his hair was awry, with clenched fingers he shook his hands to the ceiling. It was a most extraordinary sight.

Frenzied words were pouring from his mouth. The torrent of eloquence was uninterrupted. He was speaking in the broadest Cockney, and, for a moment, I had a shuddering memory of a seance I had once attended in which the medium had been possessed by a Cockney 'control.' There was the same white face, the same distended pupils, the same twitching lips. Charlie Chaplin was 'possessed' by one of the fiercest spirits of an intolerant world – by one of those tattered English demagogues who nightly gesticulate at Hyde Park. Often, on the spring evenings, I have listened to those orators, fascinated by the abandon with which they denounce the rich, drawn by the impotent fluttering of their thin, dirty hands. But I shall never listen to them again, for none of the denunciations which I ever heard in Hyde Park could equal, in their searing bitterness, the speech which Chaplin made that night. It was one of the most dangerous condemnations of the existing order which can ever have been delivered. Yet we cheered and cheered, as though we too were part of the shivering crowd in Hyde Park, and we cheered not only a brilliant performance but a superb exercise in economic argument.

Did he believe what he said or was he merely carried away by the fascination of the rôle he was adopting? It would be difficult to answer that question. Needless to say, Charlie Chaplin is not a Communist. He is a millionaire. And in spite of certain plausible theories advanced by aristocratic young men who wish to obtain power in the Labour Party without having to dismiss a single under-gardener, I am still unable to see how Communism and individual wealth can be reconciled. But though Charlie Chaplin has never claimed to be a Communist, he is inspired by as deep-seated a hatred of injustice and poverty as any Communist who ever drew breath.

One could quote many examples of his feeling of kinship with the under-dog. He told me that he kept on all his staff of workmen, camera-men, designers and experts whether he was working or whether he was not. He told me – but there is no need to dwell on what he told me. You have only to listen to him describing a Cockney newspaper-seller, joking about his rags, referring, with a wink, to the arm which he lost in the war, trying not to cough because the fog is creeping into his lungs – you have only to hear him imitate such a character to realize that there is no tragedy of life's seamy side which Charlie Chaplin does not know – not only because he has a great heart, but because he has shared the tragedy himself.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Tu Quoque

I

At the beginning of this book we were moved to comment upon the various manners in which the writers of American impressions have described their respective arrivals in New York. It might not be unprofitable to glance, for a moment, at the methods which they have used to chronicle their departures.

As usual, the skyline is the first favourite. The procedure is as follows. The author must find himself in a pensive mood. He must then walk, slowly but firmly, along the deck, and place both his elbows upon the rail – (a very difficult thing to do on these occasions). He must then apostrophize the skyline somewhat as follows:

'*And so the fairy city gradually fades. Already, the towers are disappearing in the evening mist, like tapers slowly quenched. It is difficult to believe that behind that Gothic façade there beats the fierce, wild, exultant heart of New York. And yet – a kindly heart, and a simple heart – the heart, if I may say so, of an eager child. For that is, I believe, the secret of this great people – they are* children! *They have all the child's contempt of tradition, all the child's boundless vitality,*' etc., etc.

In fact, all the child's this, that and the other. To deny this ancient legend would be regarded, by the great majority of commentators, as rank heresy, and so I will not deny it. May I not suggest, however,

that in the interests of accuracy, we might find some other metaphor? Children are the most infuriatingly traditional creatures on earth, as any boy who has suffered the tortures of an English private school must be aware. Nor has the average child such a depressing amount of vitality.

Next comes the artistic, impressionistic school. The incoherence of their descriptions is usually to be explained by the fact that they are nearly always intoxicated when they come on board. Thus:

'Lights – lights – and still more lights. Blazing, they sweep up and up. How shrill they are, those lights – how they scream to the stars "we are coming towards you, coming towards you – soon we will be there!" I am leaving the land of light, the splitting, crackling, phosphorescent furnace that is America. Am I glad? Am I sorry? Who knows?'

The steward usually knows. He has a sure remedy for all splitting, crackling and phosphorescent sensations.

There follow the business men. One can rattle off their formula with one's eyes shut:

'America is a great country. Let us make no mistake about that. I should be misleading British industry if I were to convey any other impression. Nor is America's greatness entirely due to chance. I state it as my firm and considered opinion that America has Something to teach us. What that Something is, it would be difficult to say. But as long as I hold any influence in the business world of my country – and I think I may be pardoned for say-

ing that in spite of the contempt of the younger generation, I still have a little – I shall endeavour to teach that Something to all who are willing to hear it.

'And now – if Labour will but extend the hand of co-operation to Capital,' etc., etc.

It is because I believe that America *has* something to teach England, and because I have a fairly clear idea of what that something is, that I shall discontinue these rude parodies of my fellow craftsmen and ask you to allow me to be serious for a few pages.

I love America too much to pretend that I do not love England more. I might rhapsodize, at this moment, over England – I might write in the style of those men whom I have parodied – trying to catch on paper the sounds and scents of English things – the roar of London on a spring evening, primroses lighting a yellow way down the lanes of Devonshire, the moon-parched walls of Oxford at night – yes, it would be easy enough to parody oneself at this moment. But that very love forces me into other channels – sordid, if you like, but channels which must be explored.

I am unhappy about England. If I were merely an æsthete, life would hold few worries for me, provided that I might be allowed to wander, without hindrance, along the Thames Embankment at midnight, or lie on the Sussex downs (covered with a thick rug) of a summer morning. But an unpleasant practical strain in me, which has spoiled many romances and marred many exquisite moments, forces me down to the disagreeable but basic fact that

modern life is built upon an economic foundation, and that the foundations in England appear, to my untutored but eager eye, to be crumbling.

It is for that reason that I want to clear away all pretty phrases, to blow every whiff of sentimentality out of the window, and to talk, in the dreariest possible manner, of pounds, shillings and even pence.

II

WHAT EVERY YOUNG ENGLISHMAN OUGHT TO KNOW

I should like every young Englishman to get a piece of paper and a pencil, copy down the following statement, pin it up on his bedroom mantelpiece, and read it each morning before breakfast. The statement is this:

'*I am dependent for my future existence upon the industry of England. The basis of industry is the home market.*

'*America, having* 112,000,000 *citizens to our* 40,000,000, *has a home market nearly three times as great as ours. Since, in addition, the average wealth of the individual American is almost exactly twice the average wealth of the individual Englishman, the home market of America is actually six times as large as that of England.*

'America has a six to one start. *What am I going to do about it?*'

What *is* he going to do about it? In a moment I may be able to make a few mild suggestions. But

firstly I would point out that the above statement, which I should like to see over the bedroom mantelpieces of my friends, is a very watered edition of the truth, because I am unwilling to exercise too depressing an influence before breakfast. It merely refers to the basic industrial disadvantage of markets. It does not take into account such minor little pleasantries as the War Debt, nor the National Debt, nor any other of the vast debts with which we are saddled. Nor does it mention the greatest menace of all – the perpetual threat of war on a hundred fronts.

I am convinced that young Englishmen do *not* realize these things. If you remind them that Ford is producing fifty cars to Morris's one (I don't know the real proportions) all that they say is 'How terribly energetic of him.' If you tell them that America is about to found an Empire in the South, they only smile charmingly and say 'What fools the Americans are to attempt anything so tiresome.' If you point out that English industry is slowly being throttled to death, they suggest an extra bottle of champagne. Theirs is a delightful, obviously amusing attitude. I could say the wittiest things, in that vein, myself. But I dare not. Because I am afraid.

III

WANTED – AN AMERICAN INVASION

Return for a moment to our previous thesis. I hope that I shall not be accused, after the primitive economic truths which you have read above, of denying the enormous disadvantages under which England labours in the field of industry. Yet, though I

realize these disadvantages, and wish others to realize them, I cannot possibly subscribe to that school of heavy-lidded economists who state, as a law of Nature, that 'American prosperity is inevitable, and that an English population would have shown even more amazing results, given the same advantages.' The thesis is tenable of course – almost any thesis is tenable nowadays – but I for one am unable to hold it.

On the other hand I could, without very much difficulty, hold the thesis that if England were to be invaded by a million or so of the best type of American business men, it might be a very good thing for England. Even if our home market is small, we have no cause to neglect it. You may deny that we neglect it. Then why, to take a very homely example, when one walks into an English drug-store – I beg your pardon, chemists – is one invariably offered American soap, tooth-paste, cold-cream, and all the other things which go to make life endurable? I am well aware that one of our largest manufacturing chemists has been purchased by an American firm. I am also aware that the American chemists offer, in many cases, larger discounts, and more attractive show-cards. But none of these things touches the heart of the problem. The heart of the problem is advertisement.

IV

THE BEAUTY OF BOOST

Throughout my riotous youth I went through life with one or two firm and unalterable convictions, and

the first and most spiritual of those convictions was that if I used a certain sort of soap I should keep my schoolboy complexion. That thought comforted me throughout numberless orgies. It did not matter how much I drank, or smoked, how many nameless and exquisite sins I enjoyed – they would all be wiped out in the morning by that magic soap, leaving me with a face as spotless as those of the young ladies who shed their benign influence from a million posters all over the world.

In the interests of my country I gave up using that soap long ago. I still have my sch . . . but we need not go into that. The fact which I wish to emphasize is the fact that there was not the faintest necessity for me to have bought a single cake of that soap. I bought it merely because, years ago, a bright young American sat down in an office on the other side of the Atlantic, and thought of a slogan to sell soap. And he certainly sold it.

It is not the Americans who are children. We are children – as far as advertisement is concerned. One still sees, in numberless railway stations, the dreary question, 'Good morning. Have you used P – 's soap?' Of what conceivable interest is that question? Has it a single 'selling point'? Whenever I read it I say to myself, 'No, I haven't. Why should I? Because your advertising manager is impelled by morbid curiosity? Because you would like me to? Why? Why?' If they would tell me that the soap had an irresistible effect upon the opposite sex, or that it made me open my eyes in the morning, or close them

at night, if they would tell me that it always floated or always sank, if they would tell me that owing to its marvellous healing properties, it had to be sold at six times the price of other soaps – I might buy it. Even, in the end, I would respond to a call of patriotism such as:

YOU MAY HAVE WASHED CLEAN, BUT HAVE YOU WASHED BRITISH?

On the whole, however, I distrust these calls to patriotism. We have goods to sell, and it is our job to persuade people that those goods are better than any other goods. One soap is probably, in the beginning, as good as another. But advertisement will make it infinitely better, not only in thought but in fact.

Advertising, to-day, is as important to England as was ammunition during the war. Yet we still seem to think that advertisement is a sort of parasitical growth upon industry. We wander about muttering that 'good wine needs no bush,' or some equally meaningless piece of claptrap which has been handed down to us by our ancestors. We really do believe that a good thing sells itself. It does not.

You may reply that a good thing *should* sell itself. What has that to do with it? Virtue ought to be rewarded. It isn't. Vice ought to be punished. It isn't. The practice of cruelty ought to react upon the man who practises it. It doesn't. Why? Because nothing in the world is fair or just. Why, then, should we imagine that a good thing will sell itself? Are we children in a Sunday-school class?

Advertisement, I think, is one of the few things in

the world which are, in themselves, good. I may be writing like Babbitt, but I do not care at all, because Babbitt said a great many things which were profoundly true. He said – or he ought to have said – that advertisement was a great creative force. If you think of a thing long enough and hard enough, it happens. If you think that your goods are the best in the world, and if you go on thinking it long enough and hard enough, and if you publish your thoughts with sufficient energy, your goods *will* be the best in the world.

V

TWO IDEALS

What then is to be done about it? I will tell you what *I* should do. If I were a young man preparing to devote myself, in Parliament, to the services of my country, I should apply myself to two ideals; the first ideal would be the regeneration of British industry by an enormous extension of the home and the imperial market. To say that it cannot be done is nonsense. The man who says it cannot be done deserves to be kicked in the pants, – to use an exquisite Americanism. But it must be done fiercely, with clenched teeth and a paroxysm of enthusiasm, and it should be done by the whole nation.

Children should be brought up, at their mother's knee, to believe that if they eat any but Australian bottled gooseberries, they will choke. Little boys should be taught at school that if they brush their teeth with any but British tooth-paste they will get toothache. Young women should go out at night

and buy emetics to put in their fathers' port, if it is not South African port. These things should not be done by tariffs, but by our own free will. We worked ourselves into a frenzy of enthusiasm in the cause of destruction during the war. We did far wickeder and more cruel things than putting emetics into our fathers' port. Why should we not work ourselves into a similar frenzy of enthusiasm in the cause of creation? The situation, let us admit, is just as serious now as it was then.

The second ideal to which I should devote myself would be the gradual elimination of tariffs in Europe. Instantly they read that a great many people will throw this book down in disgust. 'Why should we bother ourselves,' they will say, 'with the puerile ravings of Mr. Beverley Nichols? Who is he? What does he know about it?' The answer is – precisely nothing, which is why the ravings have, at least, the value of *naïveté*. All I would claim is this – that I have received as much education as the average politician, that I have seen a good deal more of the world, and that I have an insatiable curiosity. One may ask questions, may one not? The question I wish to ask is, how Europe, with its multitudinous tariffs, its consequently narrow markets, its perpetual expenditure upon armaments, its utter lack of cohesion, can possibly expect even to pretend to compete with America when another twenty years have gone by?

Nobody tells me the answer. Nobody knows it. Or rather, everybody knows it, but refuses to admit it. And not a single thing is being done about it. A

few quavering voices are occasionally heard in the neighbourhood of Geneva. Now and then a bomb of a sensational nature explodes in the Sunday press, but it is invariably hushed up in the next weekly issue, and silence descends again upon the land, broken only by the steady, distant roar of machinery from the other side of the Atlantic, a roar that comes a little nearer every day, a roar that may soon deafen us with its overwhelming volume.

How are you to break down those tariff barriers in Europe? Again, I have not the faintest idea. But I fail to see why it should be so infinitely more difficult than was the creation of the Zollverein in Prussia. That, when it was begun, seemed an impossible task. So, probably, did the unification of England. So, certainly, did the unification of Italy. Yet, it was done. It was done because these areas were economic units, and because there was a desperate necessity for them to unite. Europe is an economic unit also, and there is a desperate necessity for Europe to unite. To say that the thing is impossible is to accept our sentence of death.

My excursion as an amateur economist will now stop. But not my excursion as an amateur psychologist.

VI

TU QUOQUE

People have accused me of having no criticisms to make about America. That is a ridiculous accusation. I have criticisms to make about every portion of the earth and its inhabitants, because I am honest

enough to admit that the Being responsible for the existing state of affairs must appear (*to the human intelligence*) other than Omnipotent, and that it seems to me to be a misuse of that intelligence, which was provided by the same Being, to deny the fact. If I derive my intelligence from God, it is hardly logical to ask me to prostrate that gift by bowing the knee to the creator of Cancer, the World-War, the Albert Memorial, and the spectacle of a cat playing with a mouse. Nor is this a blasphemous assertion, for it is impossible to blaspheme the Spirit of Beneficent Inefficiency. You can only deplore it. And feel rather a fool, remembering your own impotence for doing so.

Of course I have criticisms to make about America. My only contention is that those criticisms are usually equally applicable to England. For instance, the Americans possess, and encourage, quantities of grotesque public figures who play a rôle far more important than is warranted by their very meagre talents. But we possess public figures equally grotesque in England. Horatio Bottomley is just as fantastic as Big Bill Thompson. We have plenty of bishops who deliver themselves of sentiments no less puerile than those of the head of New York's Society for the Suppression of Vice. And if you were to take the other side of the picture, and weigh in the balance the respective mentalities of Mr. Baldwin and Mr. Coolidge, or Mr. Mellon and Mr. Churchill, I doubt if you would find that the one was so very much superior to the other.

VII

TELLING THE WORLD

Again, I think, indeed I know, that a great many Americans are appallingly ignorant. I have studied my small-town American fairly thoroughly during the last five years, and I am forced to the regrettable conclusion that the only events of European importance which are considered worthy of mention in the local newspapers are as follows:

1. The periodical mishaps on the hunting field of H.R.H. The Prince of Wales. These are usually described, in the American papers, as 'Wales Takes Umpteenth Toss This Fall.'

2. The state of Mussolini's health, which varies from a buoyant vitality to a death-like torpor, according to the town in which the newspaper is published.

3. The lighter moments in the life of the Queen of Roumania.

4. The growth of the Kaiser's beard – which appears to shoot backwards and forwards with the rapidity of quills upon the fretful porcupine.

5. The death, re-birth, marriage, divorce, dissolution, resurrection, re-marriage, re-divorce, of any Soviet Cabinet Minister.

6. The brilliant social success in London or Paris of the leading local debutante. Thus: 'Miss Peel Pours For Royalty.' Fantastic though it sounds, I did actually read that a Miss Peel had 'poured' – (the meaning is not nearly so gruesome as it sounds) for royalty. It was reported in the papers of the prairie towns. I thought, as I began the story, that I was to

hear a tale of nameless torture. I visualized Miss Peel, tied, in a state of nature, to a post, while she was lashed for the delectation of a wicked monarch. Actually, Miss Peel appeared to have done nothing more singular than to have poured out tea, in London, for an exceedingly *declassé* Russian prince, who designs dresses – or is under the fond illusion that he does so.

7. The fortunes of the British monocle. It is in favour again – it is finally abandoned – 'Wales' is going to wear it – 'Wales' has declared against it . . . the stories vary, according to the mood of the chronicler.

8. Anything and everything to do with Mr. Bernard Shaw, who, having shown his extreme wisdom in refusing to visit America, is rightly regarded as the ultimate authority on European affairs.

Apart from this, there is nothing about Europe at all. Revolutions may be in the brewing, crusades in the making. Genius may die in its garret, Power may flaunt its pennants from the citadel, drums may sound to battle – but what does that matter? Not an echo of the turmoil crosses the Atlantic. Only the dull thud of the Prince of Wales falling into a local – and very often an imaginary – ditch.

All this is very much to be deplored. For one thing, it lulls the Americans into a false security. Every day the world is shrinking. Soon the Atlantic may itself be hushed by a whirr of wings. In the old days, a fire which broke out in Europe was quenched as soon as it reached the deterrent waters of that

ocean. But before long a conflagration in Belgrade will be as dangerous to the American people as a conflagration in their neighbouring state. A general strike in Madrid may paralyse the tramways on Madison Avenue. A single accident to a cogwheel of the industrial machine in Buda-Pesth and the whole mechanical world in which we live may be brought to a halt. For that reason I think that intelligent foreign news should no longer be the exclusive property of a very few newspapers in America.

But are we not just as bad? One can count, on the fingers of one hand, the newspapers in England which make any serious attempt to cover the immensely important field of American affairs. Bill Thompson's antics, Charlie Chaplin's emotional affairs, and the inevitable stunts about prohibition – *voilà tout.* We are not told, even with regard to these men, what they *are*, nor are we given any proper indication of their position in American affairs.

VIII

MAIN STREET – THERE AND HERE

Yet again, with reference to the daily life of the American people, it is perfectly true that the average small American town is crude, vulgar, and ugly. 'Main Street' was, on the whole, an accurate picture of the desolation of a thousand Middle-Western towns, with their dirty streets, their dilapidated Fords, their glaring drug-stores, soda-fountains, placards, iron-roofed villas, clothing stores displaying 'ox-blood Oxfords with bull-dog ties,' lunch-counters with wet oil-cloth and thick handleless cups, Christian

Science libraries, pool-rooms, yellow-brick school-buildings, gasolene pumps, etc., etc., etc.

But to me these things are no more depressing – in fact, rather less – than the average English seaside resort. Brighton is as vulgar as anything in America, Bournemouth as provincial, Southsea as drab, and Bognor is, I imagine, the most agonizingly hideous creation of man upon this earth. I have no grudge against the inhabitants of the south coast, but I feel that the world would be a sweeter place if a tidal wave could come and utterly destroy the nauseating mass of ironwork, stucco fronts, 'shelters,' penny-in-the-slot machines, mineral-water booths, ornamental gardens, 'keep-off-the-grass' signs, tea-shops, bathing machines, grottoes, bath-chairs and all the other accumulated horrors which we complacently lump together under the fragrant title of 'the English Riviera.'

'Main Street' in America is a nightmare. So is 'Main Street' in England. Let us admit both those facts, and lament the common depravity of them.

IX

THE REAL AMERICANS

I seem to be pulling out motes – or is it beams? – from all sorts of people's eyes. It gives one a charmingly impartial feeling. But I am not writing in any flippant spirit. I am writing with a very earnest desire to make you see the Americans as I see them.

For you cannot judge Americans till you see them in their own country. Of course, there are charming Americans in Europe, but as a rule it is as difficult to

transport an American across the Atlantic as a bottle of champagne. They both lose something of their sparkle. They both turn a little sour. Yet we still judge Americans by the European variety, and usually by the worst specimens of that variety – the loud-voiced snobs who caper round London in the season, and buy second-rate apartments in Paris, and lie on their stomachs during August at the Lido, trying to push their behinds sufficiently far forward to be included in a photographic group presided over by the Princess San Faustino.

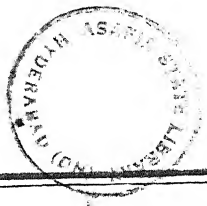
These people, let us admit it, are a bore. But they are not the real Americans. You will find *them* in the third-class section of the great American steamers – eager young students who do not care how they get to Paris as long as they get there, who are not ashamed of their burning desire for culture, who are quite determined to see and do all that can possibly be seen or done. You will find them also in the first-class section of the same steamers – shabby, unobtrusive millionaires, who could buy up most of the richest men in England, millionaires who are on their way, a little apologetically, to buy a shoot in Scotland for the simple reason that they like shooting. And if we are foolish and provincial enough to be put off by tiny differences of upbringing, we have only ourselves to blame. We ought to be able to rise above such petty details.

It gives me, I admit, no very keen æsthetic pleasure to gaze upon the horn-rimmed spectacles which seem to form so essential a part of the decorative scheme of many American males. But neither

am I moved to delight by the contemplation of walrus moustaches, which are still to be observed in large quantities parading the streets of Leeds. I find no sort of satisfaction in sitting in the parlour car of a Pullman train, asphyxiated by the heat, but neither do I count it among the keener pleasures of life to freeze to death in an English railway carriage. In a word, my friends, it is a very imperfect world, and its imperfections are not bounded by geography, nor by climate, nor by race. A platitude, but my own.

EPILOGUE

WHETHER we speak in accents loud or soft, we all speak folly. Whether our road is over 'pavements' or 'sidewalks,' we all walk in meaningless circles. Whether we set our watches five hours fast or five hours slow, Time is bearing us along the same sombre, fathomless waters. Whether the wind blows east or west, our words are scattered, sooner or later, into the final darkness. Whether we salute the Star-spangled Banner or the Union Jack, whether the tune is 'My Country, 'tis of Thee,' or 'God Save the King,' the ultimate melody is the same – a melody which is only an echo – an echo played by an unseen player, who laughs, as he plays, behind the curtain of the clouds.



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By the Same Author

'ARE THEY THE SAME AT HOME?'

'A Feast of wit and satire. He is amazingly impudent, but he is also profoundly clever. There have surely been few books of equal length so full of fresh phrases and wise impertinences.'

Daily Telegraph.